

Stories lived, told, and shared: Tasmanian drama teachers' narratives of identity

by

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Abstract

This project aimed to first examine and problematise our existing knowledge of what it might mean to be a drama teacher, and second, to employ innovative arts-based methods of research in order to explore how drama teachers themselves understand and describe their experiences. Of prime importance in this work was the connection between one of the fundamental purposes of qualitative research, and of artistic inquiry – that is, to encourage the reader/audience to engage in an act of educative transgression, questioning and examining their own assumptions about important experiences or phenomena. Instead of attempting to ‘capture’ truth or meaning through measurement and objectification, this thesis sought to place the elements of research – reading, doing, and writing – in an aesthetic dialogue, in order to promote the development of multiple meanings.

While there are established bodies of research literature in the areas of both personal identity and teachers’ lives and careers, there is a scarcity of research that attempts to engage with the connections between these two areas, particularly in terms of how teachers themselves understand and make sense of their lives. This project sought to address this issue by working closely with six drama teachers, exploring through a series of interviews the consequences of their life experiences (both within and outside the classroom) in terms of how they saw themselves as teachers, and as individuals more broadly. One of the most significant findings reported in this thesis is that often, teachers do not perceive any separation between what is personal, and what is professional. This raises significant questions about the broader processes and purposes of educational research.

As a dialogue, there was opportunity within the project for telling, as well as listening. In the interpretive phase of this project, three ‘tellings’ took place. The first telling was the interpretation of the stories told by each teacher. By reading and writing about each participant’s life within the aesthetic spaces of the text and the interview, these stories were included in an interpretive dialogue. In the second telling, sharing this new story – our story – with the participants during the interviewing and writing processes, this dialogue was extended. In the third telling, the reader is invited to join in the interpretive journey, to add their own voice to the newly developing conversation about the interactions between our experiences and identities, in and out of the classroom.

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1.

Introduction:

Questions, beginnings

I am fragments and memories, an unordered whole made up of messy pieces. I am ready to come undone – to take myself apart in measured workings and precise angles. I am ready to take out these pieces, to look at how I am made up and why. I am ready to write about myself. I wonder, is this how the participants will feel? (Journal, 5/6/2001)

1. Beginnings (Part 1)

This is a story of a personal journey that became a professional one. This is also a story of a professional journey that became a personal one. This is a story that asks whether anything professional is ever just that. This is my story, but this is not my story.

*It is a story composed
of fragments
of memories
of knowing
of lives
of asking
of hearing
the silence
reply:
Ask again.*

It is a story made up of questions that answer only in questions. It is a story of finding the questions hidden by the answers. It is a story. It is my story, but it is not my story.

And where might the story begin?

2. Finding the questions

The transformation of one's self by one's own knowledge is, I think, something rather close to the aesthetic experience. Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting? (Foucault, 1988, p. 14)

The story begins, then, as a personal question. By reflecting on my own experiences. By asking: is this the experience of others? What if it is? What could we learn from investigating this experience – of alienation and belonging, of acting and being? And why should we – or I – even care? The story begins with the questions:

What might it mean, to be a teacher?

And when might I become a teacher?

How might who I am as a teacher be related to who I am more broadly?

And what might it mean, to be a drama teacher?

But these are my questions, not the research question. My questions come from looking in.

My research begins by looking in, then looking out, and finally looking across.



Looking in.

I am not a teacher –

at least, not in the normal sense of what a teacher might be. I have a teaching degree – it says 'Bachelor of Education (Secondary: English, Speech and Drama)'. But I am not a teacher. Aside from teacher training experiences, I

have rarely set foot in a primary or secondary classroom, other than as a student myself. I pretend sometimes, imagining that I know what teaching is, and I play these games by teaching others how to teach. When I do so, I feel like a fraud. Or an actor, reading from the script. Every time, I wonder if I will be unmasked. Or will I continue to play this role convincingly, for as long as it takes? Until I am a teacher?

I am a teacher –

every morning, I told myself this. Every morning, as I walked through the glass corridor at Paterson College¹, where I was a final-year student teacher. I dressed like a teacher. I looked like a teacher. I acted like a teacher. So was I a teacher? The students in the classes I borrowed from real teachers played along. They knew the game. They knew their lines, their cues, their exits and entrances as well as I did. They knew that I was not a teacher.

I am not a teacher –

I am a margin walker. Sometimes I feel like a teacher now. Often, perhaps. I am comfortable in a classroom, I am honest and open with my students, I believe in my subject and I believe in myself. But is that really what it means to be a teacher? And when did I start to feel this way? Do I feel like a teacher because I am one? Or because other people now treat me as a teacher? I am a teacher-educator. I am a student. I am a researcher. I am a son. I am a brother. I am a friend. I am all of these, and what else? I am all of these, and none of them. Am I a collection of assigned and assumed roles? If so, am I a teacher?

Am I a teacher?

¹ In the Tasmanian education system, a college caters for students in years 11 and 12, the final years of secondary schooling.

Every night, I asked myself this. Every night, as I left through the glass corridor at Paterson College, where I was a final-year student teacher.

♦ ♦ ♦

Looking out.

I have felt for some time that as far as school is concerned, drama, and drama teachers, are a little different. It's hard to say exactly why. All through high school and even university, my drama teachers seemed to stand out. Perhaps this was because the subject particularly interested me. I liked the particular 'currency' that the drama classroom dealt with. Where else could I look at my own experiences, as well as the experiences of others? Where else did the curriculum say something to me about my life, rather than about those who lived in textbooks and on blackboards? Where else were there more questions than answers? That such a subject even exists (and is allowed to exist) seems to suggest something about those who teach drama. As O'Toole (1998) writes:

That drama ever gets on a school curriculum is a wonderful tribute to artist-teachers. For isn't drama, after all, by its very nature the first post-modern art form, with its multiplicity of messages and meanings, its manifest demonstration of "the death of the real", the way it reveals and explores the discourses of power, its affirmation of the body and, of course, its emphasis on pleasure...? (p. 9)

Perhaps it was because my drama teachers were those people who seemed more 'real' or more genuine – I felt a sense of who these people were, and not just who they were for the one and a half hours I spent with them two or three times a week. I wonder now – were these people attracted to drama teaching because of who they were? Or did drama teaching help to shape them into who they are? Or could it be some combination of these?

When I was reading in the early stages of this research, looking for a ‘way in’ to the questions that I had been asking myself for some time, I began to read things that supported how I felt about drama and those who teach it. I read the work of those who suggest that drama is in fact unique, in terms of the demands it places upon both teachers and students (Combs, 1997; Wales, 2000). I read that Kate Donelan (cited in Wales, 2000) had found, over a decade ago, that drama teachers believed they worked harder than staff in other curriculum areas, and that many were contemplating leaving the profession. I read Wales (2000), who concluded that “not much has changed over the last decade” (p. 1).

Drama teachers are expected to promote their schools through drama, write programs, mount productions, and work in inappropriate spaces, all in addition to classroom teaching (Haseman, cited in Wales, 2000). Drama, it seems from my experience, deals in emotional currency, and, as such, it may be a highly personal exercise, requiring a particular level of investment from those who teach it. I had experienced some of this firsthand on school experience, and by talking to teachers I knew. I wanted to know more about the demands of teaching drama, about how much of themselves drama teachers invested in the subject, and why. I wanted to know what drama meant to these people, and why the subject is so unique in terms of the opportunities and challenges it presents for students and teachers. By asking teachers about their lives and experiences, I felt I could also learn something about the culture of drama teaching. More than this, I thought that I could learn to ask questions that would provoke and enhance a dialogue about the meanings of drama and identity. As Krusic (1999) suggests:

Drama teachers are seeking paradigms... which will help them explain not only the reality but also the role and purpose of drama teaching. And this role is contradictory. On the one hand, as drama teachers, they need an unambiguous and positive social and educational ideology; on the other, as drama artists, they have the right to question it. (p. 17)

Unlike the teachers that Krusic speaks of, I don't seek the paradigms, or the answers. Answers have a tendency to read as closed texts, or monologues. They speak without listening for a reply. But if not answers, what could I look for? What could I hope to find?



Looking across.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) observe that the questions teachers ask themselves are different to the questions researchers often ask them. They write:

We noticed that teachers seemed to be trying to answer different questions. Their questions were ones of identity. They were questions of "Who am I in my story of teaching?"; "Who am I in my place of school?"; "Who am I in children's stories?" (p. 3)

What would happen, I wondered, if a researcher actually asked teachers these questions? What would happen if I acknowledged that "teachers [seem] more concerned to ask questions of who they are than of what they know" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999, p. 2)?

Goodson (1991) raises a question, which also came to my mind when reading the abovementioned material. He asks, not whether these questions are important to the teachers themselves, but perhaps more tellingly, why they have not (until recently) even been asked by researchers:

Listening to the teachers' voice should teach us that the autobiographical, "the life", is of substantial concern when teachers talk of their work. And at a commonsensical level I find this essentially unsurprising. What I do find surprising, if not frankly unconscionable, is that for so long researchers have ruled this part of the teachers' account out as irrelevant data. (p. 144)

I found Clandinin's (1986) characterisation of research on teacher thinking particularly useful in understanding the issues at stake. She writes: "Research on teacher thinking which deals with knowledge and teachers can be distinguished into two types: research on what we know about teachers and research on what teachers know" (p. 17). In Clandinin's view, there is a difference between knowledge *about* teachers, and *teachers'* knowledge. Looking at educational research, it seems to me that until recently, many of the questions were asked *about* teachers, rather than asked *of* them. As Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1990) have observed:

Conspicuous by their absence from the literature of research on teaching are the voices of the teachers themselves – the questions and problems that teachers pose, the frameworks they use to interpret and improve their practice, and the ways teachers themselves define and understand their work lives. (p. 23)

Having not been a teacher myself, I felt that it would be wrong for me to presume to know about who teachers were. I also felt that it would be wrong for me to attempt to translate teachers' own knowledge about who they were and why they were this way, into a form where it would appear as my knowledge about them. Certainly, I hoped that I would learn something by asking them questions, and by asking questions that teachers would perhaps have already asked themselves. However, I also hoped that I could do this in a way that would acknowledge my voice, without drowning out their voices and understandings.

What could I ask, then, to know how teachers knew themselves? How could I pose a research question in such a way that I would be able to explore, and understand, and provoke, rather than collect and translate? I wanted to ask a question that would allow me to work at the level of the 'local'. I wanted to ask a question that would focus on the specific, on the particular, on the individual, on the other – in this case, the teacher. In the end, I framed my questions around the following key question:

How do six Tasmanian drama teachers understand and describe their experiences, identities, and the culture of drama teaching?

And where am I in this question? I am at the centre, and I am hidden in the sidelines. I am asking the question, and I am answering the question. I am the narrator and the listener. I am everywhere and nowhere. I am both within and outside, and in the end I hope you will be too. Like the story, the journey begins with the personal. By reflecting on my own experiences. By asking: is this the experience of others? What if it is? What could we learn from investigating this experience, and the experiences of others?

3. Questioning identity and method

Having decided what I would ask, I began to wonder how I should ask it. The research design, then, also begins with a question – is there another way? I ask the question of the literature I read. I ask what I learn about identity from what I have read, and I ask what I have not learned.

In reading about identity, I began to notice something ironic. Identity, at least in Western culture, is often seen to make a person who they are, uniquely and individually. Who I am will perhaps always be unique, because there will be no-one else just like me, and there will be no-one else who sees him/herself in the same way that I view myself. Given this, why was it so hard to find the voices or lives of individuals in what I was reading? Why was it that, as Clandinin and Connelly (1991) write: “The study of what an education is or means for individuals is largely absent in scholarly discourse” (p. 262)? Why was it that the participants of research seemed to be invisible or at least inaudible, subordinated to theoretical frameworks and models?

I had thought I would be reading about lives and meanings. I had thought others would be studying the very thing that makes me (and others) unique, through methods that highlighted and described this uniqueness. While I found some examples of such work (cf. Britzman, 1992; Connelly and

Clandinin, 1999; Danielewicz, 2001; Mishler, 1999), much of what was written seemed to be reducing and generalising from the unique in the interests of developing models, cycles, schemes, and frameworks.

Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe (1994), for instance, in their work with 12 primary school teachers, move from working with individuals to explore their unique career stories, to using this information in subsequent interviews to explore the “global career experience by means of a set of fixed questions” (p. 50). While I learn from the general, from the broad strokes on the canvas, I can only really understand and empathise from observing the detail. Where was what Van Manen (1990) calls the “theory of the unique” (p. 155)? Also, where were the individuals?

I was reading about abstract ‘teachers’ – like cut-outs, torn from the pages of their contexts and lives. Am I only a teacher for the times that I am in front of a class of students? Might there not be other times, in other places, where what I do becomes important to who I am? Could who I was as a teacher really be so different from who I was as a person, that it could be pulled out and studied in isolation? It seemed to me, purely from the viewpoint of my personal experience, that being a teacher (or not) was something that sent ripples through all of the parts of my life, just as these other parts rippled and disrupted the part of me that taught. Was there no way to approach, touch, and be moved by these ripples? Could I not study ‘individuals’ rather than ‘teachers’? I found myself agreeing wholeheartedly with Kilbourne (cited in Barone, 2001a), that “there’s not enough of the kind of detail that develops characters... I mean characters you can love, hate, identify with, or want to be like. We need characters who bring you into their intellectual and emotional world” (p. 98).

What I knew about identity from my own experience, and the questions I was learning to ask from reading the work of those in other areas and disciplines (such as philosophy and fiction), also raised concerns for me in terms of how I could approach this research. What if, as Auster (1987) suggests, “life is no more than the sum of contingent facts, a chronicle of chance intersections, of flukes, of random events” (p. 217)? What if, as Gergen (1991/2000) writes,

life and identity are characterised by “a continuous flow of being, without obvious coherence through time” (p. 249)? If identity itself is temporal, shifting, and imbued with multiple meanings and interpretations, was there a way that I could develop a study that would offer these characteristics? If life itself does not make sense, what use would it be for me to impose my sense upon it? Surely then, any universal framework of identity I might develop, any answer I might offer, would be arbitrary at best?

I wanted to understand how individuals lived out and understood identity, rather than how researchers interpreted and represented the lives of others. Was it possible to focus on the specific, and let the reader form their own connections? Was it possible to “look at how selves are theorised in discourse, rather than trying to theorise them out of it” (Maclure, 1993a, p. 377)? Was there another way?

4. Questioning the process

There is, however, another field where questions are provoked as much as they are answered. That is in the arts. After all, as James Baldwin (cited in Barone, 2001b) claims, the greatest achievement of art is the “laying bare of questions which have been hidden by the answers” (p. 154). It seems to me that, often, the purpose of creating art isn’t to capture or describe an objective view of the world. Indeed, given that the arts do not necessarily defer to spoken or written languages, which both frame and confine how we are able to understand the world, this would be most difficult. Art doesn’t aim to find the answers, or to present declarative statements about how things ‘are’. Instead, the arts unsettle and provoke; they do not provide a circumscribed answer. As Dewey (in Richter, 1967) writes, art “is at once a means of rejecting and recreating the world” (p. 436). Works of art emerge from, and are founded in, our own subjectivities, our own questions, our own explorations. And how might artists achieve this? What are the processes that artists often use?

Following Dewey's view, I believe that rather than being peripheral to the experience of 'being' in the world, art is a fundamental process and way of thinking that is actually central to the way I (and others) experience and understand the world. Eisner and Powell (2002) summarise Dewey's view of art in a way I find particularly useful, when they write: "Dewey held the view that art is a particular quality of human experience that to some degree could be present in any interaction an individual had with the world" (p. 133). They continue that, in Dewey's view, art was:

a living process that humans experienced when a certain quality of attentiveness and emotion were a part of the engagement. This process is prefigured in the focused and taut attention of an animal stalking its prey and in the utter absorption of a toddler playing with sand... Dewey sought to re-establish a connection between art and life. In fact, he believed that putting the arts on a pedestal impeded our understanding of them. (p. 133)

If this is the case, then everyone is able to experience the world in this way, even if not everyone produces works of art as a result of that experience. It is possible to use what Eisner and Powell (2002) term "artistic modes of thought" (p. 135) in a range of experiences and contexts. According to them, artistic modes of thought are being employed when experience "is used to make decisions about which course of action to take in the conduct of one's work; a sense that this choice is better than that one, that this fit is better than another" (p. 135). In this sense, artistic modes of thought open up new possibilities for knowing and acting in the world. Indeed, perhaps this way of thinking – with an awareness of what Goodman (cited in Eisner and Powell, 2002) has termed "rightness of fit" (p. 135) – is one of the more significant ways of making meaning of life, and therefore of making qualitative judgements about how to 'act' in and on our lives.

One of the features of working in the arts is an awareness of, and exploration with, the aesthetic. Indeed, for Dewey (1934/1980), this awareness of the aesthetic qualities and forms of experience was one of the *primary* features of

artistic engagement and attention (p. 5). What is ‘aesthetic’? The word itself can be traced to the Greek word *aisthetikos*, meaning ‘relating to perception by the senses’, and before this to *aisthesthai*, meaning ‘perceive’. In a sense, then, the aesthetic is the way in which we access and interpret the world – through sight, through taste, through sensation. But as Eisner and Powell (2002) note, “aesthetic is associated not only with feeling, but also with satisfaction. Works or situations we describe as aesthetic are works or situations we tend to value because we value what they do to our experience” (p. 135). And in that sense, in works of art, it is through their aesthetic qualities that we are able to access, understand, and value them. Indeed, it seems to me that each art form or genre develops its particular aesthetic elements to the extent that they could be considered a language, in the sense that language can be defined as a system of signs or symbols used for the purposes of communication. For example, an aesthetic experience in drama or theatre is developed through a language that includes elements of role, tension, focus, and mood. The language of a particular piece of music, on the other hand, may be made up of elements such as melody, rhythm, and tempo. This communication through aesthetic language in the arts is neither accidental nor incidental. As with any language, the various elements of arts languages can be combined in numerous ways, for numerous effects. It is the skill of the artist to discover the particular combination that will communicate with their ‘audience’ (viewer, listener, reader, and so on) most effectively. As Dewey (1934/1980) writes: “The act of producing that is directed by intent to produce something that is enjoyed in the immediate experience of perceiving has qualities that a spontaneous or uncontrolled activity does not have” (p. 48).

Another aspect of communication that is common across most, if not all, languages is particularly relevant in terms of aesthetic languages: an awareness and consideration of the receiver of the message. Dewey (1934/1980) presents a useful example:

A sculptor comes to mind whose busts are marvellously exact. It might be difficult to tell in the presence of a photograph of one of

them and of a photograph of the original which was of the person himself. But one doubts whether the maker of the busts had an experience of his own that he was concerned to have those share who look at his products. To be truly artistic, a work must also be esthetic – that is, framed for enjoyed receptive perception... The artist embodies in himself the attitude of the perceiver while he works. (p. 48)

As such, the work of an artist – appreciating and enhancing the meaning of experience, and then exploring ways in which to engage others to do the same, is perhaps far from random, or intuitive. To hold in mind not only one's own engagement with an experience, but also the aesthetic qualities that will best enable engagement in others involves discipline, and dare I say, intellectual rigour.

Often, this involves setting out to create art heuristically. As Bungay (1984) writes, “art is an expression of self-awareness and a means of expanding it” (p. 33). The real work of the artist lies in this process of discovery, this aesthetic interaction and dialogue. I resonate with Moustakas (1990), who discusses the term ‘heuristic’:

The root meaning of heuristic comes from the Greek word heuriskein, meaning to discover or to find. It refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. (p. 9)

However, this process of working heuristically is by no means universal in terms of describing how all artists work, in all art forms. Nor is it unique to the arts. For example, I'm sure some mathematicians would describe their work as heuristic, as would some computer programmers, and so on. But what I find particularly exciting, and perhaps unique, about the arts, is the way in which this heuristic purpose extends beyond the creator and the process he or she has undertaken.

For me, the ‘key’ to understanding the nature of the communication between artist and audience, and thus the purposes of arts experiences, is in thinking again of arts works (of whatever form) as representing and communicating through their own particular systems of language, as I have discussed above. Because these languages are fundamentally aesthetic in their modes of communication, rather than expository, they can be difficult to translate for declarative purposes. In other words, the arts show, rather than tell. They describe, rather than explain.

The relationship between artist and audience, generally speaking, is a particularly subtle one – teaching through experience and through perception, rather than through explanation and declaration. If I think, for example, of the way in which I recently experienced a dance performance, my initial engagement could only be described as qualitative. I was struck by the use of colour, the rapidly shifting patterns of movement and stillness, the sheer power of ten dancers suddenly synchronising their movements after a period of individual movement phrases. In short, I was struck by the *aesthetic* power of the performance. It was only later that I translated this language into verbal form as a way of interpreting the meaning of the work. Even then, I still focus on the meaning I took from the work – what stood out, which dancers I most admired, the feeling of the music, and so on. I experienced the performance first, and then interpreted that experience second. As this description perhaps also demonstrates, a work composed in one language is rarely as powerful when translated to another. As I have discussed above, arts works are aesthetic, qualitative interpretations of a particular aspect of experience, often created heuristically. It seems to me that an audience’s response to this work is *also* an aesthetic interpretation of experience, filtered through the work, and formed heuristically.

However, this process is not necessarily comfortable or familiar. Perhaps because the arts enable the audience to undertake this process, to discover and explore the possible meanings of a work, rather than be told what it is about and for, arts works can often unsettle or provoke. They can promote

ambiguity, challenge understandings about the way things are. Rather than reassure or reinforce commonly held views, they may raise questions that the same audience hadn't even imagined. Why would anyone want to be challenged in such a way? Perhaps, as Polanyi (cited in Eisner, 1991) says, "We know more than we can tell" (p. 4). Perhaps it is only by disrupting the monologue of explanation and prediction that space can be made for multiple meanings, multiple conversations. Perhaps not everything in the world can be predicted. Not everything has a simple meaning. Perhaps, as Karl Popper (1970) writes:

We are prisoners caught in the framework of our theories; our expectations; our past experience; our language. But we are prisoners in a Pickwickian sense: if we try, we can break out of our framework at any time. Admittedly, we shall find ourselves again in a framework, but it will be a better and roomier one; and we can at any moment break out of it again. (p. 56)

On a basic level, perhaps there are just some questions, and some understandings, that cannot be reduced to simple answers.

And it was at this point in my thinking that I arrived, again, at some fundamental questions – at least as far as my research was concerned. Although I believe very strongly in the artistic and practical usefulness of such uncertainty, I am first and foremost a researcher. Could such a purpose, then, be applied to research? Could it be applied to *my* research? What room might there be for research to be heuristic and formative in approach and purpose, rather than summative? Could research aim to ask and understand, rather than to explain, predict, and control?

5. Questioning the purpose

There is no one right way to advance. Not all thinking or inquiring has to be expressed in a scientific, expository way,

leading to the generation of universal laws. (Diamond and Van Halen-Faber, 2002, p. 122)

For some time, I had been reading about a range of different approaches to qualitative research. I identified strongly with narrative inquiry, and its focus on the storied nature of experience. I also identified with certain elements of the feminist poststructuralist approach – the awareness of issues of voice, and the focus on interpretation and multiple perspectives. As I will discuss in subsequent chapters, both of these approaches have left their footprints not only on how I thought about research, but also how I conducted this particular project.

However, the approach in which I found myself more and more interested was that of arts-based educational research. In particular, I was interested in, and excited by, what arts-based researchers such as Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner were writing about the purposes of research in general, and of educational research specifically. One of the fundamental aims of arts-based research that they seemed to be discussing was “the re-examination of assumptions that have fossilised into presumptions” (Barone, 2001c, p. 25). How was this to be achieved? These authors were working against the somewhat prevalent view that art and research were intrinsically separate – and perhaps opposing – activities. Indeed, it seemed to me that at the heart of the case that arts-based researchers were putting forward was a reconsideration of what research was and could be. They were arguing that although research in the social sciences, and in education in particular, was often seen as exclusively ‘scientific’, this was not necessarily the only way to do or think about research. By conceiving of educational research as narrowly scientific in nature and purpose, some more traditionalist researchers were able to ‘tap in’ to a commonly held division between this kind of activity, and the kind of activities involved in the humanities, and specifically the arts. Indeed, Eisner and Powell (2002) trace this division between art and science as far back as Plato, Galileo, and Descartes.

By drawing upon the commonly held assumption that research must be narrowly scientific, it was possible for traditionalists to marginalise or discredit educational research that sought to address different purposes. The argument goes something like this: *Research is scientific. The arts are not scientific. Therefore, the arts are not research.* I have several concerns about this perspective. My first concern derives from the discussion currently taking place regarding this division between art and science. It seems to me that this dichotomy oversimplifies and limits, rather than illuminates, my understanding of *both* science and art. After all, as Sullivan (2000) argues, there is something deeply aesthetic and heuristic about the way researchers work. She writes that some researchers, those with aesthetic vision, “look at details within their contexts, perceive relations among the parts and between the parts and the whole. They look for pattern within disorder, for unity beneath superficial disruption, and for disruption beneath superficial unity” (p. 221). As such, it may be more helpful to think of art and science as different points on a continuum of the possibilities and purposes of inquiry. My second, and primary, concern is that by maintaining the tenuous separation between art and science described at the start of this paragraph, some researchers are perhaps neglecting – or deliberately ignoring – one of the fundamental purposes of all human inquiry.

The purpose of research, in the traditional view, appears to be quite clear; it is to be used as a tool (Barone, 1990/2000). Research tells us, through the generation of broadly applicable models, systems, and frameworks, how to act. Eisner (1997a) phrases this very effectively: “We prefer our knowledge solid and like our data hard. It makes for a firm foundation, a secure place on which to stand” (p. 7). For example, through research, we can learn what will happen if we teach students how to read using a whole language approach. We can predict the kinds of skills in using and understanding language in context that these students will gain. We can learn that the results are beneficial, and therefore we can know, with some degree of certainty, that we should use this approach. As Barone (2001b) states, the purpose of research according to this view is “to *reduce uncertainty*, to seek literal truth within a particular paradigm, framework, or worldview” (p. 152). If research is a tool,

then, it is a simple one. I don't focus on this tool in any detail when I use it – I take it for granted that it will do what I expect it to, and allow me to achieve the goals I seek to achieve.

There are many problems to which this 'research as tool' approach is well suited, where the certainty it may provide is necessary: in medicine, for example. But I'm not sure if the topics dealt with in educational research are always best addressed through such an approach. Educational research is inextricably connected with studying people; and unfortunately (for some) the actions and thoughts of people are not always predictable or explicable. It is in these cases – where one might *set out* to explore the unpredictable, the inexplicable, the specific – that researchers may be seeking to address another, more commonly neglected purpose of human inquiry. It is this other purpose that arts-based researchers often address.

Drawing upon the work of the neopragmatist Richard Rorty, Barone (2001b) writes that this other purpose is “the *enhancement of meaning*” (p. 153, emphasis in original), or perhaps more appropriately the enhancement of *multiple* meanings (Barone, personal communication, June 25, 2002). This purpose, it seems, has much in common with the purposes of the arts. Indeed, I think of the arts and not traditional science-based approaches when I read Eisner (1997a) arguing that “good research often complicates our lives” (p. 8). If we view research (or more specifically research texts) as tools, then the purpose of *this* tool is to open up possibility, and to raise the questions about what it is possible to know and understand. Applied to educational research, texts that work in this way “may lay bare the questions that have been hidden by certain implicit, taken-for-granted answers about education and thereby reduce the commonsensical certainty about what it means to be educated” (Barone, 2001c, p. 25²). This was what I felt I could do. This was what I wanted to do.

² Barone is writing here in reference to his book *Touching Eternity*, but the comment seems to be illustrative of arts-based research in general.

This, for me, is perhaps the most significant contribution of arts-based research – the understanding that research may not, after all, simply be a tool. As Barone (1990/2000) writes, “when used for educational purposes, a text of qualitative inquiry is, I propose, better viewed as an occasion than a tool. It is, more precisely, an occasion for the reader to engage in the activities of textual recreation and dismantling” (p. 138). The usefulness of my research lies in the fact that it is *not* a tool, to be used in only one way. Rather, it is an invitation. It is an invitation for others (the readers, the participants) to approach these questions with their own tools, their own understandings. It is an invitation to engage in the continuation of a conversation, about the fundamental nature and purpose of teaching, and about who we are or might be able to become.

These were the initial steps of my journey – finding the questions, deciding how and why these questions needed to be asked, and exploring the range of approaches to investigating them offered by research. I had learned something about what it might mean to be a teacher, and to see myself *as* a teacher, through reading the answers provided by others. However, I had also learned that there are limits to the kinds of meanings and understandings produced by approaching research as a tool – a way to net the answers, and put aside the troublesome questions. In order to challenge those limits, I realised, it was time to challenge the answers, and rediscover the questions. It was time to ask the questions that had no easy answers. Questions that I didn’t already know how to answer. Questions that may not even be answerable. It seemed to me that by basing my research in the processes and purposes of the arts, by attending to the aesthetic and the qualitative, I could find the space in which to ask these questions. Or rather, to ask them again, hearing the answers as invitations, and sharing them as such.

6. Sharing the story

Even when we think we are not telling a story, we are, at the very least, embedding our research in a metanarrative about, for

example, how science progresses or art is accomplished.

(Richardson, 1997, p. 77)

As I have indicated in the discussion above, beginning this research involved re-examining my understandings about the processes and purposes of the research act. Deciding how best to share this journey with others involved a similar rethinking – based upon the understanding that the way in which we present information has a significant role in determining what it is that we can actually say, and how this information will be used by those who respond to it. I would like to briefly discuss this here, to provide a guide, if not a complete map, for what is ahead.

First and foremost, this thesis is a report of my doctoral research. It fulfils the functions associated with such a report – making clear my decisions and actions at each stage of the journey, and sharing the understandings and meanings generated along the way. However, I realised early in the project that the best way to report this journey was not necessarily through the traditional thesis structure and style – especially given that my purpose was to raise questions, offer invitations to reimagine, rather than provide answers. My starting point, then, in developing a structure for this thesis was an acknowledgement of research as a practice – “a product of human action” (Polkinghorne, 1997, p. 9), and an acknowledgement that traditional modes of reporting research were not necessarily the best for reporting such practice. As Polkinghorne (1997) describes it, the shortcoming of the traditional thesis format is that it is presented outside of time – it is *synchronic* (p. 8). In this way:

The report submits its information as if it were all present at the same time. The order of the presentation is determined by the structure of a validity demonstration, not the actual sequence of progressions and regressions in which the research project unfolded. (Polkinghorne, 1997, p. 8)

However, research – as a practice – does not exist out of time. Rather, it is made up of events, choices, interactions, and consequences. Indeed, the knowledge that is produced through research could not exist *without* these actions, and is always bound within them. With this in mind, “to cut the claim off from the actions and happenings that led up to it is to strip it of its full meaning” (Polkinghorne, 1997, p. 9). I began to realise that if I was to invite readers to enter into this journey, questioning rather than passively receiving its meaning, I would need to do so through a *diachronic* (Polkinghorne, 1997, p. 8) text – one that displays actions and events as unfolding over time. This would allow the meaning and understanding generated through the project to be interpreted as existing within particular temporal and contextual locations – to show knowledge as something that is *constructed* through research, not *discovered* in the world ‘out there’.

Having decided to report my research as practice, the actual structure and style of the thesis were developed from the understanding that “the discourse form which is best suited for reporting human actions is the narrative” (Polkinghorne, 1997, p. 9). Narrative displays events as occurring within a sequence, establishing patterns of causality between actions and their consequences.

This thesis, then, is informed by, if not exactly corresponding to, Western narrative structure. While I will develop this structure in more detail in subsequent chapters, for now let me emphasise certain features of this approach. First, as the researcher, I am also the storyteller. I speak in the first person, and present this research as a journey that unfolded over time. The meanings and understandings that are generated within this project (and this thesis) are inextricably connected to the decisions I have made and the actions I have undertaken, and are presented as such.

In fact, it is probably more appropriate to say that this thesis tells many stories – my story as a researcher, the stories of six teachers, and the stories of researchers and writers and teachers in other places, at other times. It is my story, but it is not my story. It is the story of the participants, but it is not their

story. Perhaps parts of this will become your story. But more than any of these things, this is the story of my research. It is a story that we have lived and told, and now it is a story that I will share with you.

Second, I have made certain modifications to the traditional thesis structure, in order to more adequately resemble the Western story structure – with its beginning (introduction of events and characters), middle (complications and dilemmas that emerge and are dealt with), and end (often a resolution to the situations and tensions faced). Consequently, this thesis is a story told in many parts. I hope that these will be as familiar to you as they are to me. Each part builds upon those that precede it, and places the scaffolds for what will follow. Take away one of these parts, and the others will fall. There can be no middle, if there is no start. And if this story had no end, where would the next story begin?

I view this chapter, then, as the beginning of our story. The elements of the narrative are introduced, the characters are situated. In the next chapter, ‘Troubling experience’, we begin the transition to the ‘middle’ of the story. Complications are introduced, in the form of the tensions that emerged when I began to ask questions of the literature in the areas of memory, identity, and narrative. While I found many answers in what others have said and done, I also found many questions – and indeed, it is these questions that I focus on in this second chapter. Without tension, there can be no resolution.

In Chapters 3 and 4, ‘Ways of knowing, ways of telling’ and ‘The interpretive conversation’, I make preliminary attempts to address some of the initial complications. This section of the story details the development of my research methodology – including how the related theories of memory, narrative and identity structured the practice of this project. Within these sections of the story, new complications emerged, which required me to refine my understanding of who I was, and what my roles and responsibilities were, as a researcher, and writer. This is the ‘middle’ of the research story – coping with complications, making decisions and dealing with the consequences.

Following Chapters 3 and 4, the story of this research moves into its largest and most significant section – the presentation of the co-constructed life stories of six Tasmanian drama teachers (Chapters 5-10). This is where the research ceases to be my story, and becomes a tale told in many voices – all of which interact with each other and refuse simple classification or reduction. Through this dialogue, resolutions to many of my initial questions emerge collaboratively – in the overlaps and interplays between various speakers, in a number of contexts and times. However, given that – as Maxine Greene (1988) tells us – no story is ever complete, new questions continue to emerge.

In Chapter 11, ‘(un)Final(izable) conversations’, I attempt to bring this research story to a point of resolution – however tentative and ambiguous this may be. While providing an ‘end’ for this story, the purpose of this chapter is emphatically not to bring an end to the accompanying conversation – rather it is to provide a temporary moment of pause, to provide the space to reflect on the journey so far, inviting others to share their stories and journeys through these important educational issues. At the ‘end’ of this journey, I invite readers to begin another, dealing with questions not yet answered, tensions not yet resolved, and ideas to be trialled in practice. After all, as Barone (1997) reminds us, “good stories, as art, do not conclude, but suggest” (p. 224).

7. Beginnings (Part 2)

*This is a story composed
of fragments
of memories
of knowing
of lives
of asking*
–

*This is a story made up of questions that answer in questions. It is my story,
but it is not my story.*

Ask again.

What happens next?

*The story
has
already
begun.*

2.

Troubling experience: Between literature and life

The social sciences are concerned with humans and their relations with themselves and their environment. As such, the social sciences are founded on the study of experience. Experience is therefore the starting point and the key term for all social science inquiry. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxiii)

1. The complications

As with all stories, the beginning is crucial to the development of plot. But invariably there is change. Complications intrude and initial impressions shift. (Barone, 2001b, p. 11)

As a researcher, I was always told to define my terms clearly. That way, readers would know what I meant, when I spoke of 'identity' or 'learning' or whatever else may be important. So I did – and when I began this research journey, I tried to do the same. But what happens when the terms have no simple definitions? What happens when the definitions raise more questions than they address?

The same thing that always happens when we begin to ask questions of those assumptions that we have taken for granted for too long:

tension.

Good storytellers know the value of tension. Stories need complications. They need a sense that "something is imminent, that certain things are in relentless motion, or else, most often, there simply won't be a story" (Carver, 1994, p. 26). If there is no tension, how can there be a resolution? If there is

*no tension, what will drive the story? Before we can address the problems,
we must know what they are.*

Let me take the elements of this story –

*(Memory.
Narrative.
Personal and professional identity.)*

*and rub them together
like stones.*

*The sparks that fly loose –
that smoulder or fade –
will be the meanings.*

*Let these meanings light my journey,
let them keep me warm
even if only for
a
while.*

*Let us linger in this tension
until we can't bear the heat.*



In setting out to write about the literature that has informed my work, I was confronted with a dilemma. How, I wondered, could I write a literature review that wouldn't undermine my stated aims and purposes? Drawing upon the traditional mode of academic discourse – which “privileges theory, concepts, and taxonomies over stories, examples, and cases... generalisations and explanations over details and understanding; the simple and predictable over the complex and ambiguous” (Ellis, 1997, p. 116) would offer little in a study that aims to operate evocatively, to remain individual and contextualised, to open up possibilities rather than explain them away. But what other options were there?

Rather than adjust my purposes to suit a traditional research format, then, I decided to alter the format to suit my purposes. As such, the fundamental purpose of this chapter is to tease out some of the possibilities and meanings

inherent in the major areas informing my work – memory, narrative, and identity, and to encourage you, the reader, to do the same. This is not to suggest that such a purpose overwrites the purposes of providing the background and theoretical frame for my research. Rather, it is an attempt to provide this background in such a way that you will be able to “respect the integrity of the story as a story” (Bochner, 2001, p. 141). The meanings that emerged through this story cannot be charted or represented as a straight line, as though one led neatly to the next. The structure of this chapter, like the theoretical investigation itself, is intentionally slightly disjointed, slightly unpredictable. I want you to experience the tension, the ambiguity, the tentative nature of the knowledge elicited from theory, and the sparks of meaning that are created when this theory is seen through the lens of experience. These sparks have to be seen and felt in the moment – because once they flash, they are gone. This is embodied, contextualised theory. This is theory as it is lived, felt, and partially grasped. This is theory as it unsettles and provokes, and as it has meaning to me. And if, at the end of this chapter, you have your own questions, your own understandings, then I have achieved my aim.

2. Memory

I wanted to know about lives. I wanted to know about people. I wanted to know who they were – and how they were. I wanted to know about other people, who like me, would never be able to understand their experiences, or their selves, as they were lived. After all, as Bochner (1997) writes: “Every person’s life is a singular response to the confusion of existence” (p. 428). The present – experience, identity – is overwhelming. We can’t control these things. We can only react to them. If I wanted to know about these people, then, I would have to know them as they knew themselves – ghosts, pasts, always something in the process of becoming something new. This is the first complication – memory.

Given that I would be working with a number of teachers to explore and interpret their life experiences, memory became a central concern in my study.

I needed to know, for instance, what was actually involved in the processes of remembering. Was I asking participants to recollect, or to recreate? To begin this section, I ask: is memory static, or is it dynamic? When we remember, do we simply recall particular events or emotions, or do we actually re-experience them? I then address this question by discussing the role of context, in both shaping and bringing forth particular memories. Having determined that, as Engel (1999) writes, “The accuracy of a memory does not correspond to the vividness of a memory” (p. 15), I then discuss what ‘accuracy’ might mean in relation to memory, and whether this term even applies. Returning to the notion of context, I conclude this section by discussing the reflexive relationship between memory and time – and whether the past could even exist or have meaning without the present. These questions – about the nature of memory, and the role of context in remembering – would have significant implications for the practice of my research, in terms of what I would actually ask participants to do, and why.



Memory:

1. *A person’s power to remember things.*
2. *Something remembered from the past; a recollection.*

(New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998, p. 1155)

My favourite thing about dictionaries is their elusiveness. Like language itself, they seem to lead me in circles, saying: “You want to know what that word means? You’ll have to follow me through this maze first. You want to know what memory is? You’ll have to know what it is to remember first.” Into the circle I go.

Remember:

Have in or be able to bring to one’s mind an awareness of (someone or something that one has seen, known or experienced in the past).

(New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998, p. 1568)

So what is memory? It is a noun with a verb attached: to know, I must first act. To have awareness, I must first look for it.



I remember:

Going swimming at a pool
drowning
feeling the water fill me up
sinking
I am water
being
calm
an arm
locking around mine
pulling me out
a man
I didn't know
and didn't thank.
Now:
I breathe quickly.

I remember:

My first play
I am a judge
I sentence a man to
not hang
but sail
to Van Diemen's Land
my costume
was difficult
for Mum
to make
the cotton wool wig
wouldn't stick –
a mess
of glue and soft wool
heavy clouds
that dried out okay
the people clapped me
I wanted more.
Now:
I smile.

I remember:

Playing the lead
Tom
in our grade 8 play
about
a forest town
we wrote the script
there were
protests
fights
and love interests
I had a crush
on the girl who was playing
Tom's friend
so I wrote a scene
where they would
hold hands
the people clapped
I wanted more.

Now:
I blush.

I remember:

etc.

*"Memory:
the space
in which a thing
happens
for the second
time". (Auster, 1982, p. 83)¹*



As a way of understanding the processes of memory, some psychologists liken the mind to a computer. McInerney and McInerney (1998) write that in this approach:

...the human mind is conceived of as a complex cognitive system analogous in some ways to a digital computer. Like a computer, the system manipulates or processes information coming in from the environment or already stored within the system. It processes

¹ I have added the line breaks in this quote.

the information in a variety of ways: encoding, recoding or decoding it; comparing or combining it with other information; storing it in memory or retrieving it from memory; bringing it into or out of focal attention or conscious awareness, and so on.
(p. 63)

McInerney and McInerney (1998) then elaborate on this particular view, writing that we ‘catalogue’ our experiences in four stages: encoding, processing, storage, and finally retrieval. So, within this perspective of memory, the mind appears to be something like a filing cabinet. Experiences are filed away almost instantaneously, and are stored in this system until they are ‘retrieved’. I think of this model when I read St. Augustine, who describes memory in *Confessions* as “a great field or a spacious palace, a storehouse for countless images of all kinds which are conveyed to it by the senses” (p. 214). He describes memory, and the process of remembering, in a way which so effectively suggests this information processing model that I will quote him at length:

In it are stored away all the thoughts by which we enlarge upon or diminish or modify in any way the perceptions at which we arrive through the senses, and it also contains anything else that has been entrusted to it for safekeeping, until such time as these things are swallowed up and buried in forgetfulness. When I use my memory, I ask it to produce whatever it is that I wish to remember. Some things it produces immediately; some are forthcoming only after a delay, as though they were being brought out from some inner hiding place; others come spilling from the memory, thrusting themselves upon us when what we want is quite different, as much as to say “Perhaps we are what you want to remember?” These I brush aside from the picture which memory presents to me, allowing my mind to pick what it chooses, until finally that which I wish to see stands out clearly and emerges into sight from its hiding place. Some memories present themselves easily and in the correct order just as I

require them. They come and give place in their turn to others that follow upon them, and as their place is taken they return to their place of storage, ready to emerge again when I want them... All this goes on inside me, in the vast cloisters of my memory. In it are the sky, the earth, and the sea, ready at my summons. (p. 215)

While the basic ‘processes’ of memory are perhaps described by this ‘input, storage, output’ analogy, I have my doubts about this perspective. By likening the process of remembering to an act of ‘retrieval’, this model seems to imply a sense of sterility or objectivity, with which I’m not altogether comfortable. Is memory really so sterile and untouchable that the act of recollection is not itself an act of recreation? After all, the Latin root of ‘recollect’ means to gather again – to *reassemble*, rather than *restore*. As Engel (1999) notes, “the mental procedures involved in putting together a scene from the past rest as much upon constructive processes as they do upon retrieval” (p. 3). For example, if I remember an event from my childhood, I must acknowledge that my context has since changed. Even if I have filed the experience away somewhere, waiting to be retrieved, when I retrieve it I understand more. I can read the experience in light of its consequences. I know what happened next.

As I will discuss later, experiences which at the time seem trivial may take on significance in relation to the contexts and places of the present. Are we not, then, *changing* experiences by interpreting them in light of who we have become? How then could we ‘return’ these experiences to their places in the filing system? As Engel (1999) writes, “each time we say or imagine something from our past we are putting it together from bits and pieces that may have, until now, been stored separately... it is the rule rather than the exception for people to change, add, and delete things from a remembered event” (p. 6).

◆◆◆

I would like to explore this idea of remembering as a process of recreation rather than recollection, in more detail. In the very act of attempting to recall the past, it seems, we recreate it as the present. By trying to “see” our pasts as something outside of ourselves, we change them – as reflection is not simply an act of looking back, but one of dismantling and reconstructing the meaning of our experiences and our “being” in the world. Maybe all we can really know are the ghosts of past and future memories. Also, memories are perhaps altered or affected by the contexts in which they are called to mind.

Since we experience the world in many ways, I believe there are many ways of knowing, interpreting and understanding the world. For example, the way in which we understand and make meaning from a dance piece is very different from the way in which we understand and make meaning from an academic argument. Similarly, the way in which we remember that dance piece, the meaning it may hold for us in terms of understanding where and who we are, is likely to be very different from the way in which we remember the information we gain from an academic argument. As Engel (1999) describes above, the complication arises through the very act of remembering. While I may remember the information (or the experience) of the academic argument in verbal terms, and recount it as such, I don’t often remember a dance piece by dancing it myself. And in the translation – from a physical language such as dance, or the language of emotions that may be integral in my memory of a childhood event, to a language which allows me to recall and perhaps share these memories, the experience changes. I wonder – if I describe my memory of a dance piece in verbal terms, can I ever return to my initial memory – of the physical, or the aesthetic? While I may gain clarity, or the ability to communicate this experience to others, what might I also lose? What could be counted as the ‘truth’ of the experience – the first version, or the second? Which might be more accurate? Which is the reality, and which is the interpretation?



In thinking about these issues – of memory and truth – I am reminded of an exercise I undertook last year as part of a seminar on narrative research methods². We were asked to recall an event from our early years of schooling, something which we believed was significant or important in some way. We were then asked to write about this event. There was one instruction: to write only what we could absolutely be certain had *really* happened. After about five minutes, my page was still blank. It wasn't that I was having trouble thinking of important events. Rather, it was that I was having trouble working out what was true. How could I be sure about anything? I couldn't. To some extent, I think this was the purpose of the exercise. When we were asked to then rewrite our events, including what we believed *may* have happened, I had considerably less trouble. I wasn't the only one. Rather than being an exercise in cognitive retrieval, then, this had become an exercise in epistemology. Perhaps this is always the case with remembering. After all, as Eisner (1991) writes:

How can we ever know if our views of reality match or correspond to it? To know that we have a correspondence between our views of reality and reality itself, we would need to know two things. We would need to know reality, as well as our views of it. But if we knew reality as it really is, we would not need to have a view of it. Conversely, since we cannot have knowledge of reality as it is, we cannot know if our view corresponds to it. (p. 45)

In other words, because experience is itself filtered and interpreted while it is taking place, it would be impossible for us to access an objective or natural world, separate from or prior to this experience. As such, questions about the 'accuracy' of a particular memory could never actually be answered.

It seems that a certain tension is created when we talk about a world 'out there', which might be used as a reference point for testing the accuracy of our

² Led by Professor Tom Barone.

experiences and memories. The passage from Eisner that I have quoted above suggests to me that questions about the ‘accuracy’ or ‘truth’ of our memory of a particular experience fundamentally serve to create two worlds – the *actual* (or objective) world, and the *experienced* (or subjective) world. It is difficult to reconcile these worlds, and thus it is almost impossible to reconcile or justify our memories in these terms. As Gergen (1991/2000) writes:

There is scarcely a reader who doubts that when he or she is asleep the world goes on as it is. The world is out there, independent of us; we are but its spectators during our conscious hours. Yet in spite of the obvious fact that we are transient agents of experience in a world that will continue beyond our demise, can such a belief be justified? The distinction between the real world and the perceived world seems altogether self-evident, but is it? If all experience were removed from existence, would anything be left over to be called real “clouds” or “steeples”? If we removed from existence all that we call real-world, would anything remain that we call “seeing,” “hearing,” or “smelling”? To remove the entirety of one domain is to remove the whole of the other. Why then do we treat this unity as two realms of existence rather than one? And, as philosophers have long questioned, if each of us lives in our private experience, then on what grounds do we conclude that there is anything outside of experience? If all that we can know is in our experience, then we can know nothing beyond it – which would exclude the possibility of knowledge of an external, or nonexperiential, world. (p. 101)

Gergen’s answer to this dilemma, and mine, is that the ‘problem’ here is not one of capturing the ‘real’ world or experience – rather, the problem is the dichotomy itself, between subject and object, between the *external* and the *experienced* world. Eisner (1991) argues: “Since what we can know about the world is always a result of inquiry, it is mediated by mind. Since it is mediated by mind, the world cannot be known in its ontologically objective

state” (p. 52). Eisner (1991), following Dewey, proposes an alternative view of ‘knowing’ the world – one which circumvents the dichotomy between subjective and objective knowing. The locus of experience, he proposes, is the “*transactive*” (p. 52) – the product of the interaction between subjective and objective. The transactive is the point at which our experiences are neither internal or external, but both – the point at which mind and matter intersect. After all, our experience of the world “is a function not only of its features, but of what we bring to them” (Eisner, 1991, p. 60).

As such, all experience, and therefore all of our memories of experience, are not accurate or inaccurate as reflections of reality – they instead are – at least in part –constitutive *of* reality. My memories do not reflect my world – rather, they are my world. And if this is plausible for me, is this also the case for others? Although I had set out to study the lives of six teachers, perhaps what I was really studying were their remembered worlds. Rather than their experiences, perhaps what I was studying were the meanings they made of these experiences through memory.



If this is plausible, and our memories take on meaning as a way of making sense of the world, then what might be the contextual ‘glue’, that enables or urges us to relive past experiences and attach this new meaning to them? Why might certain events strike us in the present as so significant that they make us think and feel and live through them again? Denzin (2001) identifies four kinds of shaping moments, which he refers to as epiphanies, which shape our lives:

First are those moments that are major and touch every part of the fabric of a person’s life. Their effects are immediate and long-term. Second are those epiphanies that represent eruptions, or reactions to events that have been going on for a long period of time. Third are those events that are minor yet symbolically representative of major problematic moments in a relationship.

Fourth, and finally, are those episodes whose effects are immediate, but to which the individuals involved attach meanings only later, in retrospection and in the reliving of the events. (p. 145)

What I found most relevant, in terms of how I would approach working with my participants, was the fourth category Denzin presents – the “relived epiphany” (p. 145). Denzin indicates in the description above that these are experiences that become significant when they are relived. What is missing, perhaps, is an indication of the context in which this reliving might ordinarily take place. In the case of my work, I would be asking participants to relive the events of their lives – and so, I realised, they would not only be reporting, but also creating meaning and significance in their pasts. For the participants, this research would be a time when, as Auster (1997) writes, “you begin to explore the past, and invariably... come up with a new reading of the past, a new understanding, and because of that you’re able to encounter the present in a new way” (p. 329).



There is also an intricate connection established here between memory and present experience: that is, rather than (or perhaps as well as) constructing the meaning of our lives progressively, we must do so retrospectively. The contextual ‘glue’, in other words, that mediates and cements this process of reliving and recreating past experience, is the present. In this sense, our memories are open texts: suggestions, rather than explanations. We can read these texts again and again, finding or creating new meanings, depending upon the situations in which we find ourselves. After all, as Kierkegaard claims, “life is lived forward but understood backwards” (cited in Vialle, Lysaght & Verenikina, 2000). In this view, the process of remembering is perhaps more adequately likened to engaging in an ongoing conversation, than it is to retrieving a document from a filing cabinet. In that sense, I approached my work with teachers in this way – as more of a conversation, than a process of retrieving information.

In thinking about these issues, I was struck by the relevance of Bruner's (1990) description of the process of reflexivity. He writes that reflexivity is "our capacity to turn around on the past and alter the present in its light, or to alter the past in light of the present. Neither the past nor the present stays fixed in the face of this reflexivity" (p. 109). Revisiting Bruner now, in light of the questions I'd raised so far, made me aware of the fact that perhaps I shouldn't be talking in either/or terms about these issues. Not only does the past influence the meanings we make of present experiences, but also, reflexively, the present influences the meanings we make of our past experiences. In memory, no experience has the guarantee of permanent significance. The plot, as it were, is always subject to revision. How might we make sense of this dialogue, between 'now' and 'then'? And why, after all, do we need to live out a plot?



Without memory our existence would be a mere never-ending chain of meaningless moments. (Sebal, cited in Van Halen-Faber & Diamond, 2002, p. 260)

The past is overwhelming. The present is overwhelming. How then, do we make our lives manageable? How do we not only act in a coherent way, but also make sense of lives as a whole? How do we make the connections between what we are doing now, and what we have done in the past and will do in the future? And how would I even begin to research such a process?

3. Narrative

I wanted to know about lives. I wanted to know about people. I wanted to know who they were – and how they were. And if life is lived and understood as a response, a reaction, I wanted to know how these people responded and reacted. If life itself has no sense, no coherence, then I would have to know

about the things that people draw upon to create sense and coherence. This is the second complication – narrative.

My investigation of memory, and what this might mean in practical terms, had led me to search for a new key concept. I had started to realise that although I was still hoping to work with participants to share and reinterpret their memories, I would need to do so through a particular ‘frame’. To ask for their memories, in and of themselves, would offer little in the way of understanding how these people made sense of their lives and selves. However, by asking them to share their *stories*, I could perhaps come closer to this understanding. In this section, I will explore why this may be the case. First, I introduce and explore the concept of narrative – what makes a narrative? Next, and building on this definition, I begin to explore how I have come to understand narrative as a primary act of mind, and a crucial way in which we make sense of our experiences and lives. Central to this understanding are the interrelated concepts of temporality, causality, and coherence – for each of these plays a part in the meaning-making process. I then discuss, and problematise, each of these concepts in turn.



What do we mean when we speak of narrative? I imagine that most people would know what a narrative is: a ‘story’. But given the importance of narrative in this project, and in life in general, there are questions that need to be asked.

Narrative:

1. A spoken or written account of connected events; a story.

(New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998, p.1231)

As far as definitions go, this one is fairly simple. But is the idea of narrative itself so simple?



At its broadest level, narrative encompasses more than stories: including diaries, oral anecdotes, folklore, or historical treatises (Barone, 1995, p.73). A narrative is, in this sense, an act of sharing events and experiences. Following Barone's (1995) distinction, story is "one species huddled under [the narrative] umbrella" (p.73). So what, then, makes a story a story? One of the most common perspectives seems to be Aristotle's conception of story. According to this viewpoint, a story must contain a plot structure that at its most basic level, has a beginning, middle, and end. Barone (1995) develops this structure further:

An early phase involves the introduction and situation of characters within a human dilemma. The story then moves to a building phase in which complications arise and meaning continuously emerges until, in a final phase, a tentative, sometimes ambiguous resolution to the dilemma is suggested.
(p.73)

Barone goes on to acknowledge the Eurocentric nature of this description, as it excludes stories from other cultures that may not be temporally organised. Along with temporality, there are of course other elements that work together to create the 'plot' of the story. Causality, for instance. Action. In a story, events must take place, over time, that are connected in some way. Perhaps this is why people talk of plot 'lines', implying a linear sequence. This notion of narrative sequencing also indicates a particular mode of explanation or reasoning that must be implicit in a narrative. As Polkinghorne (1988) writes, narrative "explains an event by tracing its intrinsic relations to other events and locating it in its historical context. Thus, narratives *exhibit* an explanation instead of demonstrating it" (p. 21). Narratives are a way of understanding experience by placing it in a particular *context* – that is, the context of earlier experiences. In this way, motivations or reasons for the behaviour of a particular character in the present are established through reference to their past experiences. Scholes (1981) expresses this notion of narrative sequencing very effectively. He writes:

A narration is the symbolic presentation of a sequence of events connected by subject matter and related by time. Without temporal relation we have only a list. Without continuity of subject matter we have another kind of list. A telephone directory is a list, but we can give it a strong push in the direction of narrative by adding the word "begat" between the first and second entries and the words "who begat" after each successive entry until the end. (p. 205)

The 'middle' of a story, then, only has meaning in relation to the 'beginning'. Without both 'beginning' and 'middle', there can be no 'end'. Without this sequence perhaps, and all that such a sequence entails, there can be no narrative. In relation to my research, then, I understood that the participants would only be able to make sense of, explain, and understand who they were now, in reference to how they had come to be this way.



Given the understandings about narrative described above, I have come to see narrative as central to my thinking and my work. This importance does not derive from the use of narrative as a means of displaying experience – as an artistic device. Rather, the reason narrative is so central to my thinking in this project owes to the importance of narrative as an *act of mind* (Hardy, 1977, p. 12). Narrative is not only a way of standing 'outside' of, and reporting various events from our lives – it is also one of the primary ways in which we understand and experience these lives in the first place. Novak (1975) goes as far as suggesting that story is "an ancient and altogether human method. The human being alone among the creatures on the earth is a storytelling animal: sees the present rising out of a past, heading into a future; perceives reality in narrative form" (p. 175).

In terms of what has been written of the link between narrative and experience, two points of connection are often emphasised. First, narrative is

described as a particularly useful and appropriate means of telling *about* experience. In this way, narrative is an *expression* of experience. As Polkinghorne (1995) writes, “narrative is the linguistic form uniquely suited for displaying human existence as situated action” (p. 5). The second connection often emphasised between narrative and experience seems to run much deeper. That is, as I have suggested above, narrative can also be viewed as one of the primary means of actually interpreting and making meaning from experiences. Therefore, narrative can be seen as a way of sharing, or a way of knowing, or, perhaps most usefully, both. Of these two points of connection, it is the second – narrative as a method of meaning-making – that is most relevant in my work.

In terms of understanding the importance of narrative as a meaning-making process, I find one argument – put forward by cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner – particularly useful. Bruner (1986) argues that there are two distinct ‘modes’ of thought, both of which are central as ways of understanding and interpreting experience. These are the ‘paradigmatic’ or logico-scientific mode, and the ‘narrative’ mode. He writes:

There are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality. The two (though complimentary) are irreducible to one another. Efforts to reduce one mode to the other or to ignore one at the expense of the other inevitably fail to capture the rich diversity of thought. Each of the ways of knowing, moreover, has operating principles of its own and its own criteria of well-formedness. (p. 11)

While this distinction neglects other non-verbal ways of knowing (for instance, do we learn nothing of the world through music?), I find it useful for several reasons. First, it indicates that narrative is a fundamental way of understanding our experience of the world. It is also useful in that it places narrative knowing on equal footing with other forms of knowledge – it is not ‘soft’ or peripheral to knowledge. Narrative knowing does not ‘replace’

logical knowledge – it exists alongside it. Certain aspects of understanding will be best addressed through appealing to the logico-scientific mode of knowing, while others will be better understood through narrative means. How then might this narrative mode of knowing actually *work* as an act of mind? How might we understand our experiences *narratively*?

Central to understanding how narrative may work as an act of mind is the idea of ‘connectedness’, a term that I first encountered here in my dictionary definition of narrative. Narrative is significant as an act of mind because we need life, or at least our lives, to be coherent. In life, then, “people do not deal with the world event by event or with text sentence by sentence. They frame events and sentences in larger structures” (Bruner, 1990, p. 64). One such sequence that we use to frame those events, one structure we draw upon, is narrative – or more specifically, story.

As I have discussed earlier, at its most fundamental level, a story is a story because of plot, structure, and temporality. Perhaps these structures also frame our experiences and the meanings we draw from them – or to put it another way, perhaps it is through this form of narrative that we structure a sense of past, present, and future in our lives. I asked earlier how we are able to make sense of our lives as a whole, and how we are able to make sense of not only our present, but also our past and future. One possible answer to these questions is that we do so through narrative. We understand our lives as stories, that we tell for ourselves as much as we tell them to others – and it is by telling and retelling these stories that we gain a sense of our lives. Like attaching new links to a chain, telling our stories allows us to string our experiences together, to find structure, order, and coherence in our pasts, and from this structure, to trace possible lines to the future. Through narrative, we find causality and purpose in our past, and create a rationale and framework for our potential actions in the present – because we can imagine the stories we wish to tell of our future.

This view of the relationship between experience and narrative does, of course, have its consequences. When I shift from discussing the qualities of

narrative in texts, to discussing the qualities of narrative in life itself, notions such as temporality, causality, and coherence raise new questions and concerns, which I would now like to explore.



We... make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story. We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 150)

If we view the primary unity of most narrative structures as a focus on a temporal sequence, what implications does this hold when the story that is being told is a life? After all, as Atkinson (1995) writes, “telling our stories brings order to our experience, and allows us to view our lives both subjectively and objectively at the same time” (p. 5). But when we are in the middle of an experience, how do we know where the beginning is? When does the beginning become the middle? In other words, is this a structure that we impose upon our experiences, in order to make sense of them?

Narrative theorists such as Ricoeur (1984-1988) and Kerby (1997) have argued that the temporal structure of a narrative is not imposed *upon* the experiences of life – rather, this is a structure that is ‘borrowed’ *from* life. After all, it was Ricoeur’s (cited in Polkinghorne, 1988) hypothesis in his *Time and Narrative* series that “between the activity of narrating a story and the temporal character of human experience there exists a correlation that is not merely accidental but that presents a transcultural form of necessity” (p. 127). At a fundamental level then, the temporal sequence of life could be described as the progression from birth, through to death. Beattie (2000) writes that, according to MacIntyre, the unity of life is exactly this: “the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death, as narrative unites beginning to middle to end” (p. 5). Perhaps by telling stories to and for ourselves of our experiences, casting these experiences in a narrative frame, we are *reflecting*

an inherent temporal sequence, rather than *creating* one. As Richardson (1997) writes:

Everywhere, people experience and interpret their lives in relationship to time. Time is the quintessential basis for and constraint upon the human experience. And everywhere, humans make sense of their temporal worlds through the narrative... Through the narrative, temporality becomes interpretable in human terms. (p. 29)

According to this view, although it would be possible for us to ‘live’ our lives without a temporal awareness, it would be impossible for us to make any meaning without a sense of time. As Carr (1997) writes, “we cannot even experience anything as happening, as present, except against the background of what it succeeds and what we anticipate will succeed it. Our very capacity to experience, to be aware of what *is*... spans past and future” (p. 11-12). A life without temporal awareness, then, would be a life of unconscious ‘happenings’, incomprehensible and thus meaningless.

Rather than viewing the temporal sequence – beginning, middle, and end – of the narrative structure as a ‘distortion’ or a ‘falsification’ applied to our experiences when recreating life through story, we could perhaps more effectively look at the ways in which the events of our lives have their *own* temporal sequences, which are then reflected through the narrative structures we use to describe them. Without temporality, then, there could be no unity in text – or in life. In working with participants to explore the particular narratives they told, and the ways in which they established unity in them, I realised that I would need to attend to these temporal sequences and patterns, as one way in which they interpreted and made meaning of their lives. The second method of establishing unity in a narrative, which has significant implications when applied to life story (and thus my research) is causality.

◆◆◆

We know what to expect when we hear or read a narrative. After all, at least in Western cultures, the narrative form is reasonably easy to follow, and extremely pervasive. Our understanding of the genre betrays us; it leads us to certain expectations, to gloss over specifics of construction. One such expectation, which becomes particularly interesting when the narrative in question is a life, is causality. In narrative, we expect a plot. Polkinghorne (1995) expresses this expectation, when he writes that “stories express a kind of knowledge that uniquely describes human experience in which actions and happenings contribute positively and negatively to attaining goals and fulfilling purposes” (p. 8). If we use narrative to *explain* the events of our lives, then it seems to me that along with temporality, the basis of this explanation is the establishment of causal ‘links’ – which will allow us to predict similar links between our actions in the present, and the consequences of these actions for the future.

Bruner (1986) has noted that the notion of causality is central to the narrative mode of knowing, and *also* to the paradigmatic mode. Indeed, he argues that one of the primary purposes of *both* modes of knowing is a specific kind of exposition, whereby “statements of fact are converted into statements implying causality” (p. 11). However, the manner in which these causal links are established and verified differs greatly between the two modes. He gives this example:

The term then functions differently in the logical proposition “if x, then y” and in the narrative recit “The king died, and then the queen died.” One leads to a search for universal truth conditions, the other for likely particular connections between two events – mortal grief, suicide, foul play. (Bruner, 1986, pp. 11-12)

For this reason, perhaps it is not entirely relevant to speak of the ‘truth’ of narrative ‘explanations’ of events – for this criterion reveals little when applied to this mode of knowing. As Richardson (1997) writes, “explanation in the narrative mode is contextually embedded, whereas logico-scientific

explanation is abstracted from spatial and temporal contexts” (p. 28). Given that as I have discussed earlier, we can never know the world outside of mind, and both experience and memory are grounded and bordered by particular contexts, it would be difficult to speak of the ‘truth’ of experiences even as they happen. Perhaps it is better, then, to speak of the degree to which the causal relationships created *seem* plausible. I realised that in working with my participants, I would be asking them to connect the separate events of their lives together in some kind of organised ‘plot’, and as such, I would learn as much about how they understood and described themselves from these links, as from the events themselves. But why would the participants need to establish these connections?

One possible answer relates to another quality of many narrative structures – coherence. Nothing is superfluous in a well-crafted narrative. Narratives don’t report on the world, they create their own world, their own understanding, and this world is populated only by those who need to be there, by only those happenings which are relevant. Auster (1982) provides an effective example of this situation:

If a novelist... used little incidents of broken piano keys... the reader would be forced to take note, to assume the novelist was trying to make some point about his characters or the world... in a work of fiction, one assumes there is a conscious mind behind the words on the page. (p. 146)

But again, this understanding of narrative structure takes on new meaning when the narrative we’re speaking of is not from a text, but from a life. After all, in life, there is much that is superfluous. Human experience “does not match a carefully crafted, congruent story. It consists of extraneous happenings and everyday chores as well as multiple simultaneous projects” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16). We have no narrator to filter our world and the meanings we make from it. So what happens to our lives when we move from experiencing them, to narrating them? What might we change or forget, in the name of coherence – or, as Spence (1986) calls it, *narrative smoothing*?

One notion from psychology that casts this idea of coherence into an interesting light is cognitive dissonance theory. Engel (1999) summarises this theory:

Whenever a person holds two thoughts that are in conflict, or a thought and an action that are in conflict, he or she will experience dissonance, or discomfort, and will be motivated to change one of those thoughts to reduce the dissonance. (p. 44)

In this sense, then, if the events of our lives do not ‘add up’ to help us understand where we are now, is it possible that we may attempt to ‘cast’ our past experiences in a new narrative light? After all, if we can’t change (or even know) the ‘facts’ of our actions, what else could we change but our stories of them? As Engel (1999) writes, “people want to think of themselves as consistent. And they will distort things that make them appear inconsistent... in the face of a powerful new idea or belief it is easier to change the past than explain the change or give up on the new belief” (p. 47). Narrating our experience, then, allows us to maintain a sense of coherence, through the process of narrative smoothing. And why do we need to smooth our past? As I have discussed before, I believe this is because we need connections to our past to understand our present choices. If we don’t view our own pasts as reliable, how can we know that our actions will have the desired consequences?

It seems from this discussion that, much like any notion of personal development, the coherence of a person’s life story can only be established retrospectively. It is a story that can only be told in past tense. Our lives must be open to multiple interpretations, multiple tellings, depending on the contexts in which we find ourselves. Negotiating coherence in relation to our lives must be an ongoing, reflexive process – not a ‘state’, at which we can arrive. After all, Sparkes (1996) reminds us that “[the] search for coherence does not mean closure” (p. 484). What is coherent at one point in life may

prove in the long term – or even the short term – to contradict the story we wish to tell of that life. As Bochner (1997) writes:

When the flow of time is disrupted unexpectedly, the absence of a sense of coherence can become a matter of grave concern, and we become acutely aware at such times that the orderly, well-planned life we thought we were living out has holes in it. (p. 429)

Some writers, such as Mishler (1999), have noted that this idea of coherence – as a mutable, rather than absolute, condition – goes against what is often seen to be desirable or proper (p. 14). Linde (1993), for example, writes: “In order to exist in the social world with a comfortable sense of being a good, socially proper, and stable person, an individual needs to have a coherent, acceptable, and constantly revised life story” (p. 3). However, as Linde goes on to write, it may instead be the case that the more ‘options’ we develop to account for our current position or sense of self, the more fully we can explain that present. For example, the more a teacher can explain why he or she became a teacher through different (but complimentary) plotlines, the more he or she can integrate that decision with all other aspects of his or her present context.



To summarise this section, it seems that it would be difficult to overstate the role of narrative as a primary act of mind. It is through narrative that life appears as ‘connected’ – rather than as a flow of meaningless events. Rather than being a ‘construction’, or a distortion of experience, narrative is a way of making the overwhelming manageable. As McAdams (1993) writes, “To make meaning in life is to create dynamic narratives that render sensible and coherent the seeming chaos of human existence” (p. 166). Narrative imbues our experiences with (contextually bound) coherence, allows us to view ourselves as active agents, and allows us to understand ourselves as temporal beings. Without narrative, how would we know how to act? More to the point, without narrative, how would we know who we are?

4. Identity

I wanted to know about lives. I wanted to know about people – who they were, and how they were. And what made them different from who I was? I wanted to know about a particular kind of life – teaching. I wanted to know about a particular group of people – drama teachers. But I am a person before I am a teacher. How could I know what teaching meant to them, if I didn't know who and how 'they' were?

As I discussed in the previous chapter, one of the reasons I embarked on this project was because I could not find, in the literature, stories of other people like me – people who were teachers sometimes, but were also many other things for many other people. I asked whether who I was as a teacher could really be so different from who I was as a person, that it could be studied in isolation. I wondered whether anything could be learned through studying teachers as people. I realised that if I wanted to understand what teaching meant in the lives of individuals, then I would have to understand first what that life meant. If I wanted to know about professional identity, I would first have to ask about personal identity. In this section, then, I explore some of the tensions regarding how I have come to think about identity – how we might come to know or understand ourselves, and the ways in which we try to answer one of the most fundamental questions of our lives – *who am I?*

First, I discuss the wide variety of possible meanings of the term identity, and introduce Polkinghorne's (1988) division of identity theories into three broad categories – the substance, construction, and narrative perspectives.

Following this, I discuss each division in more detail, exploring what each might mean – practically and theoretically – in the context of this study. In keeping with the purpose of this chapter, throughout this section I make a conscious effort to 'tease out' some of the implications and possibilities of each perspective, examining what they may indicate for our lives, as well as this research. In relation to the construction perspective of identity, for example, I explore how this identity might be constructed, and who might

influence this process. In relation to narrative identity, I explore what notions of coherence might mean in this context, rather than in the context of a written narrative. Each of these areas would impact significantly on my approach to investigating identity in all of its manifestations – especially, but not limited to, professional identity.



How might we describe identity? Perhaps we should start at a basic level:

Identity:

1. The fact of being who or what a person or thing is.

(New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998, p.908)



If I think about the term identity as it often seems to be used, we apparently “possess”, or “acquire” an identity for ourselves. But where might this identity be *found*? To some extent, I think that identity must have a physical ‘presence’ – we know ourselves as the people we see in the mirror, or in photographs. But there must be more to identity than this – as we are more than physical presences. Or is identity a part of us in the way that thoughts and emotions are parts of us? These are old questions – they have been asked by other people, in other disciplines, for many years. As de Peuter (1998) writes, “intellectual thought on the self has as long a history as philosophy itself” (p. 31). However, they are also perhaps the most useful questions, in coming to define or understand something as potentially abstract as identity. There seems to be something inherently resistant to definition about the concept of identity, something unknowable. After all, as Kerby (1997) notes, “the self or subject is one of those types of beings of which one might say, with Augustine: ‘Sure I know what it is, as long as you don’t ask me to explain it’” (p. 128).

Nevertheless, efforts to describe identity, what 'I' might actually be, are both longstanding and varied. These descriptions have included:

Those which see the self as a bundle of social roles, as the sum of conditioned responses to stimuli, as an entity passing through predictable, crisis-ridden stages of development, or as a pre-formed, ahistorical substratum possessing a more or less stable set of qualities and attributes. (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, p. 119)

As a way of making sense of these varied notions of identity and selfhood, Polkinghorne (1988) divides theories of personal identity into three broad positions: those which view the self as a substance, as a construction, and as narrative. I will explore his distinction here.

In the 'substance' view, the self – often described as the *transcendental* self (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000, p. 4) – is seen as unified, static, and atemporal. This is a self removed from the events and experiences of life. As Holstein and Gubrium (2000) write, in this view the self was seen as “an idealised, abstract platform from which concepts and judgements emanated” (p. 4). How is this so? Polkinghorne traces this conception of identity back to Descartes, who believed that the self could be found in the mind: a substance separate from, and more 'real' than, the body. As Polkinghorne (1988) writes: “The substratum that underlies the series of mental or psychological states is a soul, a unique self, and each of us has absolutely certain, although private, knowledge of this self” (p. 147). As Polkinghorne describes it, in Descartes' investigation of human experience, all forms of experience are in fact forms of thinking. Whether we are seeing, feeling, imagining, or dreaming something, we are engaged in thinking. In this view, then, there is no distinction between seeing objects, and imagining them – for both are fundamentally acts of mind anyway. Because of this, we can never be sure if we are mistaken in our thoughts. The only thing we can be sure of, is that we have thoughts. We think, therefore we are. Polkinghorne (1988) describes four conclusions that can be drawn from this position:

(1) *I know that this particular "I", or self, exists and thinks.* (2) *Specifically, I have some kind of direct experience or introspective knowledge of my self and its operations.* (3) *Because I may be deluded about everything else, I do not know whether this "I" has any characteristics besides thinking, and the safe conclusion is that the self only thinks.* (4) *I could be mistaken regarding the existence of my body, and because I cannot know that my body exists, but I do know that my self exists, the self and the body must be distinct; the self must therefore be nonbody.* (p. 148)

If the body changes over time, the self remains a ghost in the shell, ethereal in the sense that it cannot be touched, but concrete in the sense that 'it' is actually an 'it' at all. As Solomon (cited in Holstein and Gubrium, 2000, p. 18) points out, this perspective sees the self as *existentially thin*. In this view, then, it is through our self that we experience the world – rather than through experience that our self develops. How could experience change who we are at a core level? After all, we cannot even be sure that the experience is 'real'. *Continuity* in this view is achieved by reference to this essential self – and who we are at this core level will not change regardless of the experiences and events of our lives.

In this sense, to study identity (my own or that of others) would be the search for a 'key', a way to unlock or reveal this essential substance. Indeed, this view of an 'essential' self – in various forms – seems to underlie a great deal of the research on identity to date. For example, the psychologist Erik Erikson (1968) defined identity as a "*subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity*" (p. 19). Further, as Gergen (1991/2000) writes, according to this perspective, "not simply did humans have an essence, but failing to possess one was tantamount to illness... To illustrate, Erikson proposed that the major achievement of normal development was a firm and fixed 'sense of identity'" (p. 41). Indeed, one of the first tasks that Erikson undertakes in *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968) is to set out for the reader

“two formulations which assert strongly what identity feels like when you become aware of the fact that you do undoubtedly *have* one” (p.19).

However, as I have described earlier, I don’t believe in the superiority of mind over matter. Rather, I believe in the transactive as the basis for our experiences in, and the meaning we take from, the world. From this perspective, it is difficult to entertain a notion of identity as ‘substance’, detached from and unaffected by the experiences of a life. After all, as Taylor (1989) writes, “we are not selves in the way that we are organisms, or we don’t have selves in the way we have hearts and livers. We are living beings with these organs quite independently of our self-understandings or -interpretations, or the meanings things have for us” (p. 34). But if identity is not a substance, what is it, and where does it come from? Where, if at all, can it be *found*?

This brings us to the second position that theorists have adopted in describing identity – that is, as an idea, or a construction (Polkinghorne, 1988). Polkinghorne (1988) traces this view of self to William James and the American pragmatists, who believed that personal identity was “an idea that a person constructs; it is not an underlying substance to be discovered” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 149). Therefore, in the ‘self as construction’ position, there is no essential self, removed from or pre-empting an experience. Rather, it is *through* experience that self is established and negotiated. As Holstein and Gubrium (2000) argue³, “Experience provides the means and the meanings through which one becomes conscious of what one is. Consciousness, in effect, is always consciousness of something” (p. 29). Experience, in other words, provides us with the frame of reference, within which our identity can be located. Without the frame, there is no way to locate the self.

³ In this quote, Holstein and Gubrium are summarising the view of identity developed by pragmatist George Herbert Mead.

According to James (1890), there are three major constituents of the whole self. These are the *material self*, the *social self*, and the *spiritual self* (p. 292). Polkinghorne (1988) discusses these elements:

(1) the “material self,” ... is derived from an awareness of one’s body at large, including one’s clothing, one’s family, one’s home, and one’s property; (2) the “social self,” ... includes, on the one hand, the perceptions or images of one’s person that one assumes are held by other, personally significant individuals or groups of individuals and, on the other hand, the social values and norms shared by the person with others; and (3) the “spiritual self,” ... is the awareness of one’s own frailties, dispositions, self-understanding, and judgement. (p. 149)

This view of self and identity is also relatively well accepted and utilised in the literature to date – in the social constructionist movement in psychology, for example. Indeed, it seems to me that there is much to recommend this position. For a start, this view of self acknowledges the role of interaction with the environment, and with others, in establishing our identities. It also acknowledges the physical as a site of identity construction and, perhaps, as a site of identity performance. Further, it seems that if we accept that identity is a construction, we must also acknowledge that *as a construction*, identity must be open to change or revision. If our selves are constructed in response to our environment and our interactions with others in the environment, we must accept that as the environment changes, so too does our reaction to it and thus our reaction to ourselves. As Polkinghorne (1988) writes, “the concept of self is not the discovery or release of some innate ‘I’; it is a construction built on other people’s responses and attitudes toward a person and is subject to change as these responses, inherently variable and inconsistent, change in their character” (p. 150).

However, if identity is built up out of our interactions with others and their responses to us, where is our continuity? How is it that we won’t become completely different people if we change profession, or move to a new area?

How is it that, in working with teachers to investigate their identities, I would be studying their lives as experienced and remembered, rather than just their interactions with me?



As early identity theorists, in particular pragmatists such as James (1890, p. 292) and Mead (1913, p. 374), as well as a number of more contemporary writers (cf. Gergen, 1991/2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000) argue, constructing an identity is a social, as well as a personal, process. Berscheid (1985), for instance, states this quite clearly:

It is difficult to exaggerate the role other people play in determining what each individual knows about his or her world. To an extent far greater than most of us commonly recognize, what we know about our physical environment, and ourselves, is determined, either directly or indirectly, within our relationships with other people. (p. 60)

The process of identity construction, then, can be likened to an ongoing conversation, between self and other. As Taylor (1989) writes, “One cannot be a self on one’s own. I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors” (p. 36). He goes on to write about the importance of a “defining community” (p. 36) – and I would like to explore the possibilities of such an idea of identity construction.

Danielewicz (2001) argues that identity, and therefore the processes of identity construction, involves two notions – similarity, and difference (p. 10). She writes: “Identity is our understanding of who we are and of who we think other people are. Reciprocally, it also encompasses other people’s understanding of themselves and others (which includes us)” (p. 10). This conception indicates one of the key aspects of an idea of self as socially constructed – the relationship between self and other. We know more about ourselves by knowing others, and how these others are both *like* and *unlike* us.

Taylor (1989) summarises this process very effectively: “One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it” (p. 35).

In this view, we come to know who we are by observing how we appear to others, and how others react to us – if there was no ‘other’, there would be no need for ‘self’. As Grumet (1988) writes, “the very possibility of my thought, of consciousness, rests upon the presence of a ‘you’ for whom I exist. My thought is a moment suspended between two primordial presences, the ‘you’ who thinks me, and the ‘you’ whom I think” (p. 7). In this view, then, there will never be a final or fixed version of the story that is me, because I am continually reinterpreting myself in light of what others say and do. All of this suggests very strongly to me that there is a *performative* aspect to identity construction – like playful or confident actors, we continually add new flourishes to the way we play a character, changing posture or the lines of the script, to see how others will react. If they react positively, we may incorporate these tentative steps into the character more fully. If they appear uncomfortable, or reject the experiments outright, we are likely to also feel uncomfortable.

It seems, then, that identity is a *reaction* as much as a creation, depending as much upon others as the self. As Schiffrin (1996) writes, “Identity is neither categorical nor fixed: we may act more or less middle-class, more or less female, and so on, depending on what we are doing and with whom” (p.199). In other words, we don’t just have a self that we keep private like an internal monologue – rather, it is a dialogue, and must be shared with others, and open to revision in response to what they say. After all, “people want not only to be listened to, but also to be understood” (Syrjala and Estola, 1999, p. 2), and to be understood we must think not only of what we wish to say, but also what we wish others to hear.

As we speak to somebody, we simultaneously attempt to ‘hear’ ourselves through their ears, to imagine how our words must seem to them, and therefore how our message will be received. As Mead (1913) writes:

The very sounds, gestures, especially vocal gestures, which man makes in addressing others, call out or tend to call out responses from himself. He cannot hear himself speak without assuming in a measure the attitude which he would have assumed if he had been addressed in the same words by others (pp. 376-377).

It seems to me that identity also works in this way. As well as altering or reconstructing our identities in response to others (as a reaction), we also try to see ourselves in the way that those around us do. This *perceived* identity has intriguing implications. Linde (1993), for example, writes that we ‘other’ *ourselves* through this process – becoming the object of our reflections, as well as the subject who is reflecting. This, it seems, is what we mean when we speak of being able to ‘see’ ourselves. Cooley (1902) refers to this as the “looking-glass self” (p. 179). He writes that there are three principal elements to the looking-glass self: “The imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgement of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification” (p. 183). This process – of imagining how others ‘see’ or judge us – allows us to make judgements about our actions, and most important for my project, ourselves.

To summarise this self/other relationship – our identities are shaped by others, both when they are physically present, and when they are imaginatively present. We become both *subject* (in that we are the ones doing the reflection) and *object* (in that we reflect on ourselves) in and through our identities. Self and other are internal states, as much as external physical conditions. Such a view of identity – as socially constructed – has consequences. For example, who my parents might think I am, and who my students might think I am, are likely to be very different people. And what is to say, from this perspective, that both groups can’t be right? Why *should* all of the various versions of who we are be reducible to one? Perhaps, as Schelling (cited in Gagnon, 1992) says, “the ordinary man or woman... doesn’t behave like a single-minded individual because he or she isn’t one” (p. 237). For that matter, how could there be any unity across our varied identities, when the tasks we must

perform, the very nature of our interactions in each situation, differ so greatly? If this is plausible, then, how could I hope to know more about my participants and who they were, than just what they presented to me? After all, wouldn't they in fact be crafting completely *new* and *different* identities through this social interaction, changing themselves in light of our context? Rather than a central presence, underlying all of these different aspects of who we are, perhaps identity can only exist, and can only act as, the sum total of the tensions and overlaps between them?



As compelling as the various arguments for the social – or looking glass – self are, there are counter arguments that are just as compelling. For one thing, I'm not sure that I agree that who we are results *entirely* from the social contexts of our lives. We are not – I hope – just receptacles for the impressions and reactions of others. As I have discussed above, identity is constructed, not just received. I don't believe that we cease to exist, or to be reflexive, when we are alone. Nor do I believe that all of our social interactions necessarily hold the same 'weight' in terms of their implications for our identities. Moreover, I know that when I wake up tomorrow, I will continue to be 'me' – to recognise the person in the mirror and the person in my memory. Although we may present different aspects of ourselves to different people for different purposes, we will still recognise our actions and reactions as our *own*. No matter who we are with, whatever the nature of our communication or interaction, we will still think of ourselves in a consistent way.

So while it may well be plausible that we have multiple aspects of self, developed as a result of our interactions with a variety of different people, I don't think it is plausible to say that our *understanding* of these is fragmented, or dispersed. If it were, how would we know how to act? Rather than being unified or fragmented then, singular or multiple, perhaps we are *all* of these things. By focusing on how people were able to *connect* their experiences, then, perhaps I could acknowledge that while participants were most likely

revising who they were in response to our interactions, they were also relating these revisions to the other experiences of their pasts – their lives up to this point. As Taylor (1989) writes, “in order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going... What I am has to be understood as what I have become” (p. 47). And so, we arrive at another perspective of self and identity. This perspective acknowledges the multiplicity, the dispersion, the fragmentation, inherent in selfhood. However, it does not do so at the expense of coherence and continuity.



The identity which the “I” discovers can only be a relative identity, that of a slow shifting in which there is always some ingredient retained. The commonest element of all... is the possession of the same memories. However different the man may be from the youth, both look back on the same childhood and call it their own. (Barone, 2001b, p. 165)

To some extent, I think, the continuity of our identity comes from the fact that we can link what we do now, to what we did yesterday, or last week, or last year. Similarly, we can remember how we thought of ourselves yesterday, last week, and so on – and we can place new experiences and impressions within this framework. Sometimes (in one of Denzin’s epiphanic moments perhaps), the new experiences may persuade or force us to re-examine who we are now. At other times, they may encourage us to re-examine who we were in the past. Memory, then, with its unreliability, its deep connection to present experience, is integral as a means of understanding where (and who) we have been. And as I have discussed earlier, narrative is fundamental to our ability to remember – particularly in relation to issues such as the continuity or (temporary) coherence of our lives. Might it be possible, then, that narrative is also fundamental to our understanding of ourselves? Might it be narrative, that allows us to understand who we might be now, and who we might want to be in future? As well as rendering “sensible and coherent the

seeming chaos of human existence” (McAdams, 1993, p. 166), might narrative also render sensible and coherent – even if only for a brief time – the seeming chaos of identity?

Many of those who are concerned with such questions would respond affirmatively. Polkinghorne (1988), for example, in his exploration of different theoretical positions on identity, argues that the third possible method of viewing identity is to see the “self as narrative” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 150). In this view, the self is not just a construction – it is a narrative, and a sense of continuity in personal identity is most definitely developed through the process of constructing a story. As Polkinghorne (1988) writes, “the realisation of self as a narrative in process serves to gather together what one has been, in order to imagine what one will be, and to judge whether this is what one wants to become” (p. 154). To return to an earlier statement, we know that we will not wake up as different people because we are constantly placing our actions, experiences, and the responses of others within the larger ‘story’ of our life. Indeed, as Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) write, one’s identity “is inseparable from the way one’s personal history unfolds” (p. 119).

In referring to narrative identity, then, I am still referring to a view of identity as a construction – in much the same way that I might refer to my past as a construction, a ‘life story’. And just as it is practically impossible to separate the narrative from the memory of experience in a life story, it would be impossible to understand or make sense of who we are without narrative. As Ellis & Bochner (2000) write: “In the final analysis, the self is indistinguishable from the life story it constructs for itself out of what is inherited, what is experienced, and what is desired” (p. 746). Narrative is not only the way we *tell* about ourselves to others – it is also the way we understand and *know* ourselves.

As I have written earlier, I believe it is through narrative that we are able to understand our past, present, and future. However, as well as giving us this sense of *life* as whole, narrative also allows us to see our *selves* as whole, connected to our past and future. As such, Connelly and Clandinin’s (1999)

definition of identity as “stories to live by” (p. 4) is illuminating. Without narrative, what sense would we be able to make of our experiences? More to the point, what connections would we be able to make between these experiences, and the selves that we construct in response to them? After all, as Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) write: “Most narrativists would agree with Stephen Crites’ judgement that, in the absence of story, the self ‘contracts into the thinness of its personal pronoun’” (p.119).

To summarise – identity, at least as it makes sense to me, is a construction. This construction becomes meaningful and relevant in our lives when it is understood through narrative – when we are able to see ourselves as the protagonists of our past experiences, and the potential protagonists of our future experiences. However, this view doesn’t imply a sense of ‘finality’ or closure to identity. Instead, this perspective views identity as “a particular set of sited language games whose rules discursively construct the semblance of a more or less unified subjectivity centred in experience” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000, p. 70). Because there will always be multiple aspects to our identities, this story must always be changing, and as it does so, our understanding of self – who we are and who we want to be – will also be revised. The language games, so to speak, must go on for as long as there is a self to be spoken about and interpreted. Danielewicz (2001) describes this process⁴ very effectively: “As persons in the world, we are continually engaged in becoming something or someone... We might think of a person’s identities as points of fixation, temporarily arrested states, that are achieved moment by moment” (p. 3). Coherence in identity will always be, as de Peuter (1998) writes, a “possible temporary outcome” (p. 44). The reflexive task must go on, regardless of any temporary points of connection or unity. Any coherence in our identities – the ‘lines’ that we draw between who we were, and who we are and will be, must always be lightly sketched, rather than heavily etched. The construction that is our self is always just out of view, one step ahead of our ability to narrate and therefore understand it. Just

⁴ Of identity negotiation as an ongoing process – not specifically in relation to narrative identity.

like everything else in life, we must live it first, and then try to understand it however we can.

5. Professional identity

I wanted to know about lives. I wanted to know about people – who they were, and how. But I didn't want to know about the lives of 'people' – I had a specific group of people in mind. I didn't just want to know about 'lives' in a general or abstract sense – I wanted to know about a particular kind of life. I wanted to know about drama teachers – who they were, and how.

What did their teaching have to do with their identity? In each person's stories of self, was being a drama teacher a chapter? Was it a footnote? Or was it part of the plot, woven through every chapter? How would each teacher answer these questions, if at all? How would they address the following:

*Are my experiences as a teacher mine, or are they me?
Is being a teacher something I do, or is it something I am?*

This is the fourth complication – professional identity.

Having addressed the interrelated areas of memory, narrative, and personal identity, I began to think about the central concern of my research. What might professional identity mean? Before I could ask those I would work with what it meant to them, I needed to know what it meant to those who were writing about such things. In this section, I address the concept of professional identity, as it is understood and theorised in the literature. I identify two perspectives presented by theorists – first, the view that professional identity is a role that is acquired, simply by performing the duties and functions of a teacher. The second perspective is that professional identity is individually constructed, but still separate from personal identity. The notion of 'investment' in one's professional identity arises from this

view, as a way of differentiating between, but still closely aligning, that which is personal, and that which is professional.

In this section, I discuss both of these perspectives on the process and nature of professional identity in turn, paying particular attention to what each implies for drama teachers specifically. In concluding this section, I question whether such concepts as professional identity should even be discussed in either/or terms, and suggest that it may be possible for both perspectives to be enacted simultaneously across the variety of people and places.



None of us are to be found in sets of tasks or lists of attributes.

(Paley, cited in Carter, 1993, p. 5)

What might professional identity mean? Like any story, it seems, professional identity is told differently by different people. Like any story, professional identity is also used to serve particular purposes, to structure ideas about teaching and teachers in certain ways. Like any story, it is most likely that all of the possible variations of the professional identity story are plausible. In practice, all of the versions can, and probably do, exist at the same time, both within and across individual teachers.

The first version of the professional identity story, then, uses the term to refer to the identity of ‘teachers’ as a whole group. I see this perspective in the work of Sachs (1999), who writes that professional identity “is used to refer to a set of externally ascribed attributes that are used to differentiate one group from another. Professional identity thus is a set of attributes that are imposed upon the teaching profession either by outsiders or members of the teaching fraternity” (p. 4). This perspective, then, emphasises the role of the social context in the development of professional identity. It uses the term primarily to refer to what are perceived to be attributes of ‘teachers’ in a general sense – the identity of ‘the profession’, so to speak, as it is handed down to teachers from those both inside and outside of the teaching fraternity. Individual

teacher identity will always be constructed in reference to – and legitimated by – this group identity. For an individual, Coldron and Smith (1999) write, “being a teacher is a matter of being seen as a teacher by himself or herself and others; it is a matter of acquiring an identity that is socially legitimated” (p. 712).

To illustrate this process, Sachs (1999) writes:

Clearly teachers inhabit multiple professional identities. For a primary school teacher for example, these might include the general category of primary teacher. However this can be broken down into further identities by year level, such as a junior, middle or upper school teacher. (p. 5)

In identifying myself as a teacher, I will draw upon both my own and others’ perceptions of the attributes of one or more of these groups, and the extent to which I am displaying or representative of these common ‘teacher’ attributes.

If this is plausible, what are these common attributes? How does the identity of the profession develop? Most often, it seems, these common attributes arise from observations *about* and *of* teachers, rather than observations *from* them. Lortie’s (1975) notion of an *apprenticeship of observation* (p. 61) seems relevant here – in that he suggests that we all have extensive experience, from our own schooling, of seeing what teachers *do*. However, it would be much harder, if not impossible, to observe – during this apprenticeship – how teachers might think and feel. So if we ask ourselves what it is that all drama teachers, for example, have in common (in order to identify them as a professional group), the answer is essentially that they all perform a certain set of roles and functions – the external, observable tasks of drama teaching. The externally ascribed attributes, then, that will determine the extent to which I identify myself as a drama teacher, are based around these roles and functions. The process, as theorists who subscribe to this perspective of how professional identity functions and is established describe it, works like this: *I teach high school students about the skills and processes*

of drama. I mark student assignments, meet with parents, and attend staff meetings. I am a disciplinarian, a facilitator, a friend, a guide, a director, and so on. Because I do these things, and these are the things that drama teachers do, I am a drama teacher.

However, a number of theorists also highlight a tension inherent in this notion of professional identity. Sachs (1999) hints at this when she writes that such a conception of identity "...can serve the needs of the State by providing a framework for externally initiated controls" (p. 6). Britzman (1992) also voices concerns about such a view: "There is a problem when the teacher's identity is taken for granted, when it is approached in some a priori way, as an outcome of pedagogical skills, an aftermath of being there in the classroom" (p. 23). The problem is that by viewing teachers in this way, professional identity is seen as synonymous with teacher role and function –and therefore increasingly distanced from personal identity. In other words, who we are – or how we identify ourselves – as teachers, does not necessarily reflect who we are as people. Indeed, there may even be sharp contrasts between how we behave, think, and feel out of school, to how we behave, think, and feel in school.

As McWilliam, Hatcher and Meadmore (1999) note, this version of the story is increasingly being drawn upon, as calls for teachers to be "more professional" (p. 2) multiply. They go on to describe the climate of the late 1990s, when such calls began to emerge:

For most of this century, it might have been possible to say that all eyes were, or should be, on the teacher. In the 1990s, this imperative has been reworked to ensure that those doing the "looking" are not just students, but the whole community. As a result, teachers must keep a sharp eye on themselves by turning their attention to their own self-regulation in quite unprecedented ways... The role of teachers and principals has been transformed. Where communities may once have indulged the bumbling eccentricities of principals, and the idiosyncrasies and

weaknesses of individual teachers, now keen scrutiny and high expectations are brought to bear on the management of schools, with educators themselves having the spotlight turned on their performance. (p. 3)

In this view, being more ‘professional’ actually means being more like everyone else – being more of a representation of the roles and functions of a teacher that are perceived as acceptable. What must be regulated, in this climate, is the *self*. Instances of individual or idiosyncratic behaviour must be stamped out – if the “eccentricities” and “weaknesses” (to use McWilliam et al (1999)’s terminology) are removed, teachers (generalisation intended) will be able to better fulfil the standardised roles and functions they are assigned. They will “identify with the efficient, responsible and accountable version of service that is currently promulgated” (Sachs, 1999, p. 6). They will identify with *the profession*, rather than identify themselves as *professionals*.

What might the implications of such a view be for drama teachers? First of all, as Whatman (1997) notes, drama teachers are often extremely capable of playing roles – including the role of teacher. She writes: “People who have experience in performing will readily adopt the roles required of teachers because their experiences of performing have taught them the processes of role taking” (p. 174). I wonder if, because of this ease in adopting new roles, there may be a leaning towards this view of what it means to be a teacher among drama educators? Do they see ‘teacher’ as one more character to be played? Perhaps. But it would appear that some do not. Whatman (1997) quotes from the journal of one of her student teachers, Anna, who is experiencing some discomfort with this notion of role-taking as the focus of being a teacher and seeing oneself as such. Anna writes:

I think the thing which limits me when it comes to acting, may actually be a help with teaching. This is having a limit as to how personally I will allow things to affect me. I remember a discussion I had with some of the other trainees about being oneself in the classroom. I was saying that I thought that was

vital. They made the point that in teaching, one assumes a role or puts on an act and performs – all of which implies that the teacher is not being herself. (p. 176)

Whatman's (1997) response to this tension is to claim that the real issue being addressed is how her students defined role-taking. According to her *own* definition, no teacher will move beyond this role-taking – even if they believe that they have. She writes:

It is probable that for beginning teachers, role-taking is a conscious, deliberate act but with experience the shifts in role become less conscious so that the illusory nature of role as the real self is maintained effortlessly and often unconsciously. This is something to aim for. (p. 176).

Like an actor who has played the same role for many years, over time it may become difficult to tell where the role ends, and the person begins. There seem to be elements of the person in the role, and elements of the character in the person. But blurred as it may outwardly appear, the divide is still there, and always will be – because in this story, being drama teachers is something that we *do*, not something that we *are*.



Whereas role can be assigned, the taking up of an identity is a constant social negotiation... There is a distinction between learning to teach and becoming a teacher. (Britzman, 1992, p. 24)

There is, of course, another view of what professional identity might mean and be. This next perspective draws attention to the individual rather than the group, viewing professional identity as primarily a personal construction, rather than a received social and institutional role. Perhaps most importantly, this view calls attention to the distinction between role and identity –

highlighting a belief that there is more to being a teacher than performing basic functions and playing out scripted roles. In the first view of professional identity, all it takes for others to see us as teachers is for us to act as teachers, and perform adequately this predetermined role. Identifying as a teacher, then, becomes almost an automatic process – like trying on a costume. Put it on, and we become teachers. Take it off, and we become ourselves again. In the second view, there is less distinction between the costume and us. According to this view, the real work of professional identity is based around “the terrible process of inventing rather than assuming an identity” (Britzman, 1992, p. 33).

In referring to the difference between role and identity, particularly in relation to teaching, Mayer (2000) writes: “A teaching role encapsulates the things a teacher does in performing the functions required of him/her as a teacher, whereas a teaching identity is a more personal thing and indicates how one identifies with being a teacher and how one feels as a teacher” (p. 7).

According to this definition of professional identity, who we are as teachers is not divorced from who we are as people. This definition allows space for teachers to also be people – to think, feel, and identify with the roles they must perform, rather than just *do* them. Like personal identity, professional identity will differ for each person, as each will make different meanings of their experiences as a teacher, and each will be informed by different feelings and thoughts. Indeed, in this second definition, the personal and the professional are linked through a far more complex and reflexive relationship than was suggested by the first. If we want to move beyond simply *acting* as teachers to actually *being* teachers, we must draw upon this relationship.

Britzman (1992) writes of the tension that is inherent – at least initially – in becoming a teacher:

It is an identity that is at once familiar and strange for we have all played a role opposite teacher for a significant part of our lives and this student experience seems to tell us what a teacher is and does. The identity of teacher, however, does not seem so

transparent once one steps into the teacher's role; once there, role and identity are not synonymous. That is, role speaks to function whereas identity voices investments and commitments.
(p. 29)

In other words, while our student experience may prepare us for the roles we will perform as a teacher, it will not prepare us for what Beattie (2000) refers to as “the interconnectedness of the personal and the professional in the process of becoming a teacher... the deep connections between the intellectual, emotional, social and moral” (pp. 5-6). Another difference, then, between this perspective of professional identity and the first is in the attention drawn to the emotional connection we have to our work as a teachers. It is not enough to *act* like teachers – we must *feel* like teachers as well. In this sense, those who write from this perspective of professional identity draw attention to the connections between the personal (how we think, feel, and commit to being teachers), and the professional (what we do as teachers) – suggesting that it is in the interaction between these that professional identity is shaped and formed. Often, this connection is expressed, as in the Britzman quote above, through the notion of personal and professional *investment* – how much of our personal lives, time, and energy we devote to teaching.

Interestingly, while calls from various educational stakeholders for teachers to be more ‘professional’ seem to be drawing upon the first, more generalised conception of teacher identity, there are a number of calls from within the literature on professional identity for teachers to be more ‘invested’. For example, Danielewicz (2001) writes that “a good teacher is an invested teacher, someone who identifies him- or herself as a teacher” (p. 3). At the heart of these calls is the idea that to be invested is to be personally ‘connected’ to teaching, and to an identity as a teacher. Further, a number of writers establish a link between being invested in teaching, and being an effective teacher. Danielewicz (2001) argues this very strongly when she writes about the difference between taking on the role of the teacher, and establishing a professional identity:

Roles are flimsy and superficial, transitory and easily adopted or discarded. They seem to be whole and complete, like a ready-made set of clothes that one can put on before class and take off after. I wouldn't be a very good teacher if I felt I was playing a role... Identities require the commitment of self to the enterprise in a way that acting out a role does not. A teacher must rise to the occasion time after time, the self goes on the line every day.
(p. 10)

If this is plausible, how much of our personal lives should we commit to teaching? How much should we invest? According to Nias (1989), investment will differ for each teacher, in terms of how much can or should be given. On the one hand, “there are some teachers who, consciously or unconsciously, reduce the boundaries between their occupational and other lives” (p. 17), but on the other hand, there are teachers who don't reduce these boundaries. “Those who do not”, Nias (1989) writes, “either leave the profession or lose interest in it” (p. 3). Feeling like a teacher, and therefore identifying with and taking on a professional identity, involves being yourself, being whole, and being natural in the classroom (Nias, 1989, p. 183-185). And indeed, many teachers that I have spoken with can remember occasions in their teaching when they have felt whole and natural. However, as Nias (1989) puts it, these moments are often “dearly bought” (p. 191).

And here is the paradox of teaching, and of professional identity according to this story of what it might or should be – what Woods (cited in Nias, 1989, p. 18) has termed the *hidden pedagogy of survival*. The more we invest in our teaching, the more we gain, but the more we have to lose. Nias (1993) expands on this paradox:

Teachers are easily trapped. The more they identify with their jobs, the greater the satisfaction they receive from their personal relationship with individuals and classes. Similarly, the more outlet they find in their work for varied talents and abilities, the

greater the incentive for them to invest their own personal and material resources in their teaching. They become victims of a double paradox: the personal rewards to be found in their work come only from self-investment in it, yet when the cost of the latter is too high to be paid, its rewards are also reduced. (p. 144)

Teaching, it seems, is a profession that will take as much as each individual will give – and indeed, this can be a rewarding process. And yet, there is a point where this investment can no longer be sustained. With this knowledge, it seems, comes the knowledge that teaching will no longer be as rewarding. This has interesting implications for this view of professional identity – that as well as drawing upon personal identity to establish a teaching identity, this process can (and will) work in the other direction. Who we are as *teachers* will, in other words, have repercussions for who we are as *people*. These will be as serious or as shallow as we let them become.

This story of professional identity also has particular implications when applied to drama teachers. According to O'Neill (1995), the very nature of the dramatic encounter in the classroom can blur any boundaries between what is personal, and what is professional. After all, "identity and the questions it raises are fundamental themes of all drama" (p. 82). More to the point, the dramatic world operates in such a way that traditional archetypes or presumptions about the roles and purposes of 'the' teacher cease to be relevant or applicable. The dramatic world, O'Neill (1995) argues, is "a place of separation and transformation where the rules and relationships of classroom life are suspended" (p. 66). Drama teachers, then, must be willing to suspend their assumptions about how teachers can and should act, and what a classroom can and should be like, choosing instead to think and feel *with* the drama experience. O'Neill (1995) writes that drama teachers must be *liminal servants* (p. 66), surrendering their usual roles and status, to operate between one moment and the next, one role and another. In this state, "participants are neither what they have been or what they will be" (O'Neill, 1995, p. 66). In that sense, a drama teacher's professional identity will be acted out on the

boundaries – between one role and another, between past and future, and between teacher and person. O'Neill (1995) describes this process:

When the drama world takes hold and acquires a life of its own, all of the participants will return across the threshold of that world changed in some way, or at least not quite the same as when they began. The key to both the power and the purpose of process drama and theatre lies in the fact that they not only permit but also demand that we discover other versions of ourselves in the roles we play or watch other actors playing. We slip the bonds of our identities and participate in other forms of existence. (p. 151)

It is important to note, though, that in this story the drama teacher *will* still return to themselves, albeit with a different perspective of who that self is. Although this teacher inhabits multiple boundaries and crossing points, the boundaries are always there. They are just open to be crossed from *both* sides – professional to personal, as well as personal to professional.

In light of this, perhaps it isn't so difficult to understand why MacLure (1993b) observed, when investigating teacher identity in the UK, that "a surprisingly high proportion of teachers (more than half) wanted to deny at least part of the identity of 'teacher'... These teachers seemed happy to embrace the *role* of teacher, but wanted to shrug off the identity" (p. 318). Blending personal and professional can be an uncertain game, especially if one or the other begins to falter. Being a teacher, in this story, isn't just a case of how much a teaching identity reflects an identity more broadly. It's also a case of learning to negotiate how much teaching will affect life and self as a whole.

◆◆◆

It quickly became apparent in this study that professional identity is a slippery concept... Although there is considerable literature

on related subjects such as self image the literature on the professional identity of teachers is rather more limited than one might expect. (Jeans and Forth, 1995, p. 1)

In reading what others had written about professional identity, I was struck by what would turn out to be an extremely important point – both of these views of professional identity establish a ‘divide’, or a dichotomy, between that which is ‘personal’, and that which is ‘professional’. This dichotomy can be a source of continuing tension, for individuals and for teachers as a whole.

In the first view, professional identity is like the mask worn by a chorus member in a traditional Greek play. This mask is made for each chorus member by an external agent, and is the same for every performer, to be worn so that individuals don’t stand out. In the chorus, the group is of prime importance, and individuals are simply a component of this group. In the second view, professional identity is still a costume, albeit one created by each individual out of the materials of their own life. It is unique, but still something that is more or less *like* the ‘real’ person, the ‘true’ self. It is simultaneously built *upon*, and separate *from*, these foundations. This view seems to be implied, for example, when Buttignol (2000) writes that being a teacher “involves an identity change and that should never involve cutting off personal aspects of self. The teacher self always needs to be informed by the personal self” (p. 368). While personal and professional are definitely connected, and strongly, they are still separate – for if the teacher self is informed *by* the personal self, it must be outside of it.

I soon discovered that this divide between ‘personal’ and ‘professional’ seemed to be inherent in much of the literature on professional identity. Early on in my reading, I was surprised to find that in this literature, there was very little written to link such an idea to the rich and diverse literature on personal identity. While some studies made cursory mention or gave a brief definition of identity in a broader sense, many did not. Some writers, such as Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe (1994), even stated explicitly in an endnote that they would like to avoid such discussions: “By not using the term

‘identity’ we avoid conceptual discussions because this term has very different meanings depending on one’s anthropological and philosophical assumptions” (p. 59). Perhaps ironically, this comes after an earlier statement that “teaching is an occupation that strongly involves the teacher as a person” (Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe, 1994, p. 46).

Indeed, this divide between personal and professional seems to consistently underpin the methods chosen by researchers to study professional identity – even in work where writers claim the two are linked. Nias (1989), for example, states that in her work, “under the orderlied analysis of teachers’ self image... lie the elusive and often unorderedlied identities of individual men and women” (p. 26) – and ‘under’ is where these identities remain, unsaid and unexamined in the discussion of who these people are as teachers. Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt (2000) chose to survey 80 secondary teachers, to explore the way teachers saw themselves “as subject matter experts, pedagogical experts, and didactical experts” (p. 751) – in other words, how they saw themselves *as teachers*. Little consideration was given to how these people may see themselves more broadly, aside from commenting that “teachers’ teaching context, experience, and biography are categories of factors that may influence their perceptions of their professional identity” (p. 761). Again, the divide is presumed, but not questioned.

The presumption seems to be there whenever researchers attempt to study professional identity by observing teachers when they are in classrooms or at schools, or by using questionnaires to discover the characteristics of professional identity. Why does no-one observe teachers (or at least ask teachers what they do) when they are at home? On weekends? Why are teachers asked how they see their *practice*, but not how they see *themselves*? Why is it that there is scarce mention in any research literature on what teachers do when they aren’t teaching, or working on school-related matters? By broadening the methods used to investigate professional identity, might I not also broaden my understanding of the term itself?



To return to the questions posed at the start of this section:

In each person's stories of self, is being a drama teacher a chapter? Is it a footnote? Or is it part of the plot, woven through every chapter? Are my experiences as a teacher mine, or are they me? Is being a teacher something I do, or is it something I am?

After exploring these questions here, I don't think they can be 'answered' in any kind of categorical or generalised way – at least, it is not my intention to do so here. For some teachers, perhaps, teaching will be a chapter. For some, a footnote. For some, it may even be the most important part of the plot.

As researchers are now turning to disclosing the complexities of teaching (see Barone, 2001a, for a discussion of this move, or Combs, 1997, for a discussion of the complexities of drama teaching specifically), perhaps it is also time to disclose the complexities of identity as it is lived by teachers. Perhaps it is time to explore how stories of professional identity are lived and told – what teaching is and means to individuals, both personally and professionally. To look at how these stories may or may not interact and overlap with the stories that have been told about personal identity, it seems to me that I must be prepared to explore these complexities outside, as well as inside, the four walls of the classroom and the schoolyard. How I would actually do this, is the subject of the next chapter.

6. Questions answered, questions raised

I have other questions – particularly questions about drama – that I have not been able to answer through the literature. If, as Martin-Smith (1999) writes, “educational drama leads to a transformation of identity” (pp. 235), does this process reflect back upon the teacher? If identity transformation is one of the outcomes for students of educational drama, is it also an outcome for teachers? If so, are they transformed as *teachers*, or as *people*? Is this the ‘reward’ for personal investment – or is it the danger?

There is nothing in the literature. At least, no answers. The resolution, then, is that there is no conclusions to be found in what others have written. As it was me who asked these questions, it must be me who addresses them. The resolution is an end *and* a beginning. It is the end of listening to the stories of others who have been on similar journeys, and it is the beginning of my own journey. Perhaps this is always the case with resolutions.



*It is time
to throw the stones –*

*(Memory.
Narrative.
Identity.)*

*to accept the sparks for what they are or were
to accept the tension as all there is
to accept that I will never know which way is the right way
to accept that perhaps all meanings will smoulder and fade.*

*And while they may light my journey
these sparks are not the journey itself.*

*It is time
to stop looking for a path
and start making one.
It is time to move on.*

3.

Ways of knowing, ways of telling:

Methodology (1)

I increase my capacity neither for understanding nor originality by a defensive posture. To seek new epistemological and methodological avenues demands that we chart new paths rather than constantly return to well-worn roads and point out that they will not take us where we want to go. (Tierney, 1998, p.68)

1. Telling the story

*Sometimes
(in life
in art
in research)
the most telling part of the journey
is the private story.*

For an artist, or in life, it's mostly okay that this remains private. People can interpret the work – whether it be in a gallery or walking alongside them – in their own way, form their own stories about what they see and how it came to be, and that is enough. But with research, particularly arts-based research, this dialogue, and the ensuing product, need to work together and be explored, developed. I didn't work with a selection of paints or materials – I worked with the lives of other people. With that in mind, here is what I offer: an invitation, to join in our interpretive conversation, to follow our journey.

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*As we make our path through the
questions and complications
let me share with you*

*(in whispers
in the sounds carried between breath)*

a private story.

2. Ways of telling, ways of asking

The qualitative researcher... uses the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials are at hand... If new tools or techniques have to be invented, or pieced together, then the researcher will do this. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 4)

This chapter starts where the complications unfold. It starts in the gaps and the intersections, in the shadows between tension and meaning. It starts with the questions that remain, and with the answers that challenge.

I would like to start this part of the story – of how my participants and I came to know what we know – by revisiting the complications. What became meaning, and what remained as a tension? After all, these questions have driven the research, provided the signposts, or perhaps even the map. The questions and tensions raised through the exploration of narrative, memory and identity both structured and provided theory for my research design.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, I define identity as a story of self that we tell in order to make sense of who we are, and why we are like this. In a sense, this narrative is also a blueprint, which guides us in knowing how to act and be in the world. Because our identity narrative is based in memory, and memory is mutable (itself relying on interpretation rather than fact), it is multifaceted. New meanings, new ways of viewing the self, can add to or replace old meanings over time. I have suggested some of the ways in which being a teacher might shape or interact with this story of self – as part of the main plot, as a chapter, or even as a footnote. The complication now, was seeing whether such understandings were even relevant in the lives and selves of others.

As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) imply in the passage about qualitative research I have quoted above, designing this project was an eclectic process. It

involved adopting and adapting ways of working and thinking from a range of approaches. I took very seriously the caution issued by Fontana and Frey (1998), that “we cannot... let the methods dictate our images of human beings” (p. 72). In the next breath of this story, I will tell you how I attempted to let my understanding of human beings dictate my methods – how I shaped my theoretical concerns and understandings into research practice.



Understanding grows from personal experience that enables a person to see and feel in ways so varied and full of changeable meanings that one's self-awareness is the determining factor... even though we do not have the wisdom to enumerate the reasons for the behaviour of another person, we can grant that every individual does have his private world of meaning.
(Axline, 1964, p. 15)

After establishing the destination of my journey, the next step was to begin to map out how I might reach this point – how I would ‘practice’ this research. I began this process by revisiting some of my key questions about identity. If we accept that identity is a construction, understood through narrative, then we must also accept that it cannot be ‘essential’, substantial, or perhaps even knowable. I couldn’t search for the truth, or try to find out and describe who my participants ‘really’ were. There was no ‘key’, that once found, would unlock and reveal who these people were and how they came to be like this. As Denzin (1989) writes, “there is no clear window into the inner life of a person, for any window is always filtered through the glaze of language, signs, and the process of signification” (p. 14). Because of this process of filtering, I could only ever hope to know how the participants *described* themselves, interpreted themselves, or understood themselves. I became interested in coming to know the participants in the ways they knew *themselves*, in telling of them in the ways they told of themselves. But how could I research interpretation, rather than fact? How could I also acknowledge that participants’ understandings of themselves, and therefore

my understanding of them, would only ever be temporary, and subject to change as they continued to live and interpret?

The first decision I made in addressing these questions was also one of the most significant. I decided that if I wanted to know how people understood and described themselves and their experiences, then I would have to explore this through narrative. Specifically, I decided to focus on the life stories of participants. There were two main paths that led me to this decision.

The first related to my focus on exploring interpretation as well as experience. As Josselson and Lieblich (1995) write, “through narrative we come in contact with our participants as people engaged in the process of interpreting *themselves*” (p. ix, emphasis added). Given that one of my aims in working with others was to see the meanings that they made of their own experiences, asking participants to share their life stories would perhaps be one way to achieve this. Let me elaborate. In traditional research approaches, it seems that the researcher often provides the interpretation of experience – who shows the ‘point’ of it all. Such an approach offers little scope to explore the participants’ private worlds of meaning – it is the facts that are important, not the interpretation of them. While I didn’t want to *explain*, or claim to *know* these private worlds, I did hope to glimpse them, or at least encourage the participants to do so.

Narrative seemed well suited as a way of exploring how participants saw themselves, because the responsibility for determining and exploring the meaning of particular experiences would be shared, along with the experiences themselves. As Livia Polanyi (cited in Chase, 1995, p. 2) argues, and as I discussed in the previous chapter, telling a story is different to simply reporting ‘facts’, because there is usually a point to be made in a story – and it is the narrator who takes responsibility for making it. Telling stories, then, involves another ‘layer’ of reflection rather than simple reporting of facts – that is, the teller of a story must reflect not only on *what* is said, but also *why* it is said. Perhaps this is what Tierney (1998) means, when he writes that a life story is “a personal narrative whose ontological status as a spoken

interaction between two (or more) individuals *helps create, define, and hopefully change reality*” (p. 63, emphasis added). Eliciting life stories, it seemed, might be one way of entering into, or at least glimpsing, each individual’s private world of meaning.

Second, if we understand identity narratively, then we understand it as a position that is continually being negotiated, on a continuum of past and future experiences. I realised that participants’ interpretations of themselves *now* would be meaningless if removed from the context of their lives as they have been lived, and as they would like to live in future. How could I study identity without studying their pasts, presents, and futures? In other words, looking at individual stories wouldn’t really shed much light on the means by which “someone else makes sense of the world” (Tierney, 2000a, p. 545), let alone how they made sense of themselves. I needed an approach that would address participants’ lives, not just isolated events from their lives. Then I remembered what Linde (1993) writes about life stories – that they allow us to see how participants establish connections between the different events of their lives. She writes that a life story:

Is not simply a collection of stories, explanations, and so on; instead, it also involves the relations among them. Thus, when any new story is added to the repertoire of the life story, it must be related in some way to the themes of the other stories included in the life story, or at least it must not contradict them. (p. 25)

It wasn’t just stories in general that I was interested in. Rather, I was interested in working with participants to reconstruct and explore how the events and experiences they shared had meaning as a *plot*, rather than a sequence of isolated episodes. It was this plot that would contextualise and provide the foundation for their current stories of identity. My first decision, then, was to offer the participants “an invitation to re-story” (Barone, 2001b, p. 37). I would ask them to tell the story of who they were, and of what drama teaching meant to them, through the stories of their lives and experiences.



Given that I had decided to focus on narrative as data, how would I work with participants to explore their interpretations of their experiences and lives? How, if at all, could I ask them to reflect, discuss, and re-story their lives, without also making them tell *their* stories in *my* way? And how could anything so potentially complex and unknowable as a life be condensed into an intelligible form?

The answer, in terms of how I would work with participants to explore their life stories, was to return to the idea of narrative. I began to think of my research primarily as an invitation to story, for me and for the participants. I thought again about how stories are often told, the structures they employ. I remembered Barone's (1995) description of story structure that I introduced in the previous chapter. I thought about how I would like to tell the story of my life – how I would construct it, what would be important in terms of the structure and the plot. I would start by locating myself now, in the big picture, the 'grand tour' of my life. After all, the past is always framed by the present. In any story, this is the first step – "the introduction and situation of characters" (Barone, 1995, p. 73). Then I would introduce more detailed information – move in closer and closer from the big picture, looking at each of the individual details within it. I would end with where I am now – in the sense that we are always looking to the future, imagining who we will be as a result of what we do now.

I realised that the methods could work through a similar structure. The participants and I could start our research journey in the past, and then examine the present, and imagine the future. We could do this in a way that would leave each of these temporal locations open to change and revision, examining past, present, and future both within and across particular methods. We could follow this narrative framework – beginning by situating the present for each participant in the context of his or her life as a whole, and then progressively examining this life in more detail. The end point, although not

exactly a ‘resolution’, would be the present – but a present that anticipates the future.

I also realised that I would need to draw upon multiple methods of data production – as the method employed to establish the broad parameters of the participants’ lives might not be the most suitable for a close investigation of the meaning of particular experiences. In deciding to use multiple methods, I took into account Laurel Richardson’s (1994) description of the purposes commonly ascribed to the use of multiple methods of data production. She writes that often, researchers refer to the use of multiple methods as an attempt to triangulate their particular phenomenon – usually claiming (as I myself have done in earlier work) that this triangulation enhances the validity of research ‘findings’. The assumption underlying such claims is that “there is a ‘fixed point’ or ‘object’ that can be triangulated” (Richardson, 1994, p. 522). In other words, triangulation assumes that there is something to be ‘captured’ or circumscribed. By triangulating, we are marking out the boundaries of a possible reality, attempting to get as close as we possibly can to finding ‘an’ answer in the middle of these boundaries. Given my belief in the transactional nature of our engagement with the world, where the only meanings we can access are those that we create, such an image or rationale for using multiple methods seemed most inappropriate.

My decision to use multiple methods then, as well as being a pragmatic choice, resonates with the alternative image that Richardson (1994) provides – the crystal. She writes that the crystal:

Combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, alter, but are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends upon our angle of repose... crystallisation provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the

topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know.

(p. 522)

If the phenomenon, or the ‘crystal’, in this case was each participant’s life, I wanted to examine this life from several different angles of repose, to see what light would be refracted, what meanings would emerge, from each position. However, while I wanted to look from several angles, I did not expect – or want – to see *all* of the reflections from this crystal, as if this would even be possible. I recognised that although multiple, complex, and shifting, the understandings that participants, readers, and I gained from each position in relation to individuals’ life stories would always be partial – a way of *interpreting* rather than *containing* their meaning. Let me now discuss how I came to work with the participants written about in this text, and then explore each angle I chose to explore the meanings of their life stories.



Given that my intention was not to produce generalised knowledge, but to focus on detail and depth of understanding, I realised very early on that I would not select participants based on any criteria of representativeness. Indeed, I was reluctant to even refer to the participants as a ‘sample’ – for such a term implies a focus on a group as indicative of a larger population. While I certainly hoped that the teachers I worked with would offer glimpses of recognition for others who read their stories, I did not intend to make claims about any group larger than those I would work with. I also realised that, given restraints of time, I would not be able to work with a large group of teachers – nor did I want to.

I decided that, rather than develop assumptions about what ‘kind’ of drama teacher would be best suited to the project and target these people, it would be best to let the teachers themselves decide if they were suited to the project. In other words, I decided to arrange a self-selected sample group. Fortunately, I was involved as a member of the state professional association for drama teachers, and knew that the annual conference would provide an excellent

opportunity to meet with a large number of drama teachers from around the state. I approached the conference organisers, and was given a ten-minute time slot during the conference ‘forum’ to speak with the group about the purpose of my research, and ask for interested teachers.

As a result of my talk at the conference, nine teachers expressed their interest in the project. Over the next few months, I met with the majority of these teachers individually, to discuss their involvement in the project. Of the original nine, only six were in a position to continue the work – of the others, one was too busy, and I was unable to contact the remaining two. Of these six teachers, two did not progress beyond the first task. At this point, I was left with four participants – John Martin, Emily Reade, Anna White, and Sarah Morgan¹. I already knew John and Emily – both had supervised me in earlier years while I was a student teacher. In discussing this group with my supervisor, we decided to contact another two drama teachers in the area, neither of whom had attended the conference – Molly Hayes and Michael Green. Both agreed to participate in the research. It’s important to note, I think, that we didn’t make this decision to ‘recruit’ additional participants in response to any potential concerns about the representativeness of the ‘sample’ group. Rather, we made the decision for the opposite reason – we felt that if my rationale for sampling was not to provide a generalisable group, I should instead aim to provide considerable depth and contrast in experience – to use this as an opportunity to show difference, as well as similarity.

With these six teachers involved as participants in the project, we were ready to begin our journeys together.



We need to begin with, or at least work our way toward, some sense of the broad parameters of the other’s story, the life

¹ All participants’ names are pseudonyms.

experience he or she seeks to make sense of and communicate.

(Chase, 1995, p. 12)

As a starting point in the process of producing and reinterpreting participants' life stories, I knew that we would need some shared background. After all, each individual would be telling stories from the perspective of where the story was located in his or her life as a whole. I would also need a sense of this terrain, of each person's life, before I could know where we were within this in any given story. It would be necessary to create a map. Given that I was primarily interested in learning from each person's own understanding of this territory, I realised that I would need this map to come from them. I wanted them to define the borders and the boundaries. In other words, I wanted them to situate their own stories of experience. In order to frame their life stories, and thus begin the process of constructing them, I asked participants to create an annal, described by Clandinin and Connelly (1994) as "a line schematic of an individual's life divided into moments or segments by events, years, places, or significant memories" (p. 420).

Given what I had learned about memory, I realised that it would be impossible for participants to recall all of their lives – to give the whole picture. Rather, they would recall certain events, and they would recall these for use in a specific context. As a way of providing the context for this remembering and re-storying, I asked each participant to focus their annal on the events and experiences that they thought had been important in leading them to be where and who they were now. I also asked them to focus on the experiences themselves as a way of structuring this annal, rather than trying to write to a particular sequence of time.

As such, the annal served a dual purpose in my study. First, it set out the broad boundaries of participants' experiences – a starting point in the process of reflection and re-storying. Although we would often move beyond the events listed on this initial timeline through subsequent work, it served as an indication of their initial understanding of themselves and their lives. In this sense, the first purpose of the annal was that it would be a source of data.

Second, it served as an introduction to the particular way of thinking about life, experience and identity that I realised would be called upon during this work. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) write that “we involve participants in creating annals and chronicles as a way to scaffold their oral histories, of beginning the process of having them re-collect their experiences” (p. 420). I realised that this was not necessarily a familiar way of thinking in the context of everyday life, where new events and the urgency of the present often focus our stories toward the future, rather than the past. The second purpose served by the annal, then, was as a way of setting up the scaffold for participants’ reflections. I was going to be asking them to reflect and reinterpret, not just report, and I wanted to give them (and me) time to adapt to this way of telling their life stories. I hoped that it would also imply to the participants that I would be working with them as *individuals*, and the focus would be on their specific experiences, rather than any generalised experience of ‘teachers’.

3. Participant stories

As a second step in the research process, I asked each participant to tell the stories of one or more events from his or her annal. My instructions at this stage were deliberately quite broad – I simply told the participants that they could choose which events to describe, how to tell them (either by writing or dictating), how many stories they would tell, and what degree of detail they would provide for each story. In practice, participants’ responses to this task varied considerably, from Molly, who wrote only one story which focused on what she described as the most significant event on her annal, through to John, who spoke for approximately two hours about many of his experiences growing up, departing a great deal from the account of this time he had given on his annal.

My main purpose in asking participants to tell their stories at this stage was to encourage them to share in the ‘ownership’ of the research process – giving them an opportunity to share their own story, in their own way. I felt that this would be an important step in the lead-in to the life story interviews, and

would provide a location from which we could begin to explore each participants' life. To revisit Clandinin's (1986) terminology, it was important to begin our collaborative life story journey within the framework of *teachers' knowledge*, rather than beginning with what others had written *about* teachers. As with the annals, then, the initial stories were significant both as a source of data, and a means of establishing the tone for future reflection and discussion. After both annal and initial stories had been completed and shared, I began to enter into the interpretive conversation more overtly – through a series of open-ended interviews, aimed at co-constructing each participant's life story, and thus their stories of identity and drama teaching.

4. Grounding interviews

Interviews... are not time out of life. They are not contemplative spaces where deeds can be dispassionately described without "prejudice". So the search for narratives that truly and transparently reveal what really happened looks pretty much like a red herring (MacLure, 1993a, pp. 376-377).

Before I actually started to plan or conduct the interviews, there were several issues associated with this technique that I needed to address. First, and perhaps most fundamentally, was the relationship between talk (and thus interview data) and reality. How do our *ways* of describing relate to *what* it is that we are describing? Certain approaches to interviewing, it seems, are premised on this relationship being one of correspondence. In these approaches, interviewees are able to describe the 'truth' of the past, and we can verify this truth by the degree to which their accounts correspond to what 'actually' happened. The interview, then, becomes a quest to reveal or uncover the truth of participants' experiences. As MacLure (1993a) describes it, "the correspondence view supposes, then, that life histories are literally stories waiting to be told; that the 'true' life history is already inscribed in the sequence of events that took place in the past" (pp. 375-376). The data sought through this perspective are reports, rather like facts that could be read from a public record. Interviewers want to know what really happened, and

according to this perspective, if they do their job properly, they may well find out.

Collins (1998) notes that it is often this type of interview that is referred to in textbooks about research methods. This model of communication “supposes that people are independent of language” (Stevens, cited in Collins, 1998, p. 3) – that words are simply a way of transmitting facts and meanings that are already established, and have taken place elsewhere. It makes sense, from this perspective, to have a detailed interview schedule, a list of rigid questions. It makes sense to minimise the ‘influence’ of the interviewer, to limit his or her ability to interpret, rephrase, or elaborate. After all, the interviewer doesn’t have the facts that are to be extracted from the exchange – the interviewee does. It is only if we move away from this correspondence view of the relationship between talk and reality that such ideas begin to seem irrelevant. And indeed, there are many researchers who *have* moved away from this perspective, particularly those who describe their work as poststructuralist or postmodernist in orientation. MacLure (1993a), commenting on this move, writes that “the idea of a non-fictional narrative as a literal transcription of what ‘really happened’ has turned out to be a rather fragile notion” (p. 376).

From my perspective, and in terms of what I hoped to achieve, the idea of interviewing as a way of capturing facts began to seem *very* fragile. For one thing, as Denzin (1989) notes, “Language, in both its written and spoken forms, is always inherently unstable, in flux, and made up of the traces of other signs and symbolic statements. Hence there can never be a clear, unambiguous statement of anything” (p. 14). Talk is not precise at the best of times. Words have multiple meanings and multiple uses, and are often selected not because they are most appropriate in and of themselves, but because they are the most appropriate given the particular context and audience. This situation becomes even more complex when words are used to describe experiences – to put an experience into words is already an act of interpretation and translation. Language filters – for example, what words would you choose to describe an emotion? Or a colour? Given this, how

could any selection of words ever present a clear record of what ‘actually’ happened, outside of reporting a conversation?

In other words, I began to question whether talk, or language more broadly, would even be up to the task of corresponding with reality. This task is even more impossible if, as Eisner (1991) writes, “our experience of the world is a function not only of its features, but of what we bring to them” (p. 60). If the locus of experience is transactive – the point at which mind and matter intersect – it would be impossible for language to correspond to an objective reality, because this objective reality is impossible to access in the first place. Language, then, doesn’t reflect reality (or if it does we’ll never know this is the case), rather it creates it, by making the unknowable accessible, by reducing and filtering and constraining.

Rather than viewing the interview as a way of reporting on or describing experience and reality, I began to view it as an opportunity to explore the ways in which people “explain, justify and make sense of the raw data of experience” (MacLure, 1993a, p. 377).



Given what I have said above, it was clear that my purpose in interviewing would not be to reveal the truth about who and why people were the way they were. As I have stated earlier, I wasn’t expecting to uncover a ‘key’, to unlock the inner worlds of the participants. Such a purpose would imply that an internal self (or truth) did exist, and my quest then would be to access, reveal, and explain it. While I was interested in participants’ worlds of meaning, I wasn’t expecting these meanings to be keys or portals. I didn’t expect them to be any more or less than interpretations of experience, filtered through language.

My purpose in conducting the life story interviews, then, was to provide a context for these presentations and reinterpretations of identity and experience. Given that the past is only ever understood in relation to the

present, how could the interview itself – the present – not impact upon what was remembered from the past? How could an interview be anything but an interpretive event? Rather than acting as an objective ‘record’ of the lives of each participant, my hope was that the interview data could be read as a record of our joint project of reinterpretation and re-storying. The meanings participants arrived at through the interview process were not predetermined – they were negotiated and constructed through the interview event, during the journey. The interviews were not just to be a report of the life story, but also the occasion for its existence.

I was also prepared to acknowledge my role in the production of these life stories. As Kvale (1996) writes:

The interviewer does not merely collect statements like gathering small stones on a beach. His or her questions lead up to what aspects of a topic the subject will address, and the interviewer’s active listening and following up on the answers co-determines the course of the conversation. (p. 183)

Interviews, then, are contextually bound – and as a part of the context of their creation, I would be at least partially responsible for the data each interview produced. Interviewees listen to what they are asked, and (to some extent) attempt to answer these questions. They look for signals from interviewers, to know if they are saying the ‘right’ thing. If so, they continue to answer in this way. If not, they will try to respond in a different way. This process is well documented, in a range of literature about interviewing². For this reason, write Fontana and Frey (2000), “we cannot lift the results of interviews out of the contexts in which they were gathered and claim them as objective data with no strings attached” (p. 663). How I would acknowledge the contexts of the life story interviews, and my own role in the production of these interviews, would emerge as an issue in the writing of each participants’ life.

² See, for example, Mishler (1986), chapters 2 & 3, Hollway and Jefferson (2000), chapter 3.

At this stage, though, I began to think about how I would actually ask participants to share (and thus construct) their life stories.

I realised quickly that many of the more widely described approaches to interviewing were based on a correspondence perspective on the relationship between interview data and reality. Fontana and Frey (2000), for instance, write that in the traditional, structured approach to interviewing,

The interviewer is carefully instructed to remain as passive as possible, so as to reduce his or her influence – the scope of the interviewer's function is to access respondents' answers. This is a rational type of interviewing; it assumes that there is an objective knowledge out there and that if one is skilled enough one can access it, just as a skilled surgeon can remove a kidney from a donor and use it in a different context. (p. 663)

In this approach, it seemed, the interviewer would take total responsibility for deciding what was important *in* the interview, and what would actually be produced *through* the interview. As Hollway and Jefferson (2000) put it, in this approach “the interviewer sets the agenda and in principle remains in control of what information is produced” (p. 31). Indeed, there was a danger that the interviewer – if not sufficiently distant – could ‘contaminate’ or pollute the data, and thus threaten the correspondence between interview and reality. However, given that I was interested in participants’ own interpretations of their experiences, to follow this approach would work against what I wanted to achieve, and why I had decided to interview in the first place. After all, as Mishler (1986) writes, “the standard approach to interviewing is demonstrably inappropriate for and inadequate to the study of the central questions in the social and behavioural sciences, namely, how individuals perceive, organise, give meaning to, and express their understandings of themselves, their experiences, and their worlds” (p. ix). My challenge was to move outside of this approach, to find a way of interviewing where I would quite clearly *share* the control, or responsibility, for the meaning and content of the interview talk.

My starting point, in terms of finding another way of thinking about research interviews, was the work of Mishler (1999). In particular, one phrase that Mishler used stood out to me. When talking about his own interview practice, he writes that it is respondent-guided, so that he can listen to participants' "ways of telling" (p. 150). This became a key phrase in my study, and a phrase I would use when introducing the interviews to participants. My task was not to extract the best data or the most accurate facts – rather, it was to respect and facilitate their ways of telling. I didn't expect participants' ways of telling to be standardised, or to move along the same paths to the present. For that reason, I began to focus on approaches to interviewing that would work with these differences, and with the uniqueness of each participant's life story, rather than approaches that would produce standardised data.

It seemed to me that perhaps the most effective way to explore participants' ways of telling would be to give them the 'space' to explore this themselves. I decided to focus on open-ended interviewing, especially given that as Denzin (2001) writes, "The use of open-ended interviewing is based on the assumption that meanings, understandings, and interpretations cannot be standardised; they cannot be obtained through the use of a formal, fixed-choice questionnaire" (p. 66). I began to think about how I could reinterpret the interviewer-respondent relationship – if my role as interviewer was no longer to ask standardised questions and elicit standard responses, what *was* my role? If the role of the interviewee was no longer to respond directly and efficiently to direct and efficient questions, what was *their* role? Denzin (2001) suggests one possible way of redefining the role of the interviewer – as a good listener. A good listener, he writes,

Doesn't talk; rather, he or she lets others talk. Interpretive research requires that the observer become a good listener, a skill that involves several elements. First, a good listener does not gossip. Second, a good listener does not interrupt. Third, a good listener shares his or her own experiences, thereby

transforming the traditional interviewer-respondent situation into a conversational interaction. (p. 66)

In this way, the role of the interview itself is renegotiated – from a structured interaction which aims to produce data regarding the particular topic being investigated, to an open-ended conversation between two people who are both speakers and listeners, with the aim of interpreting the particular topic through dialogue. I noticed with some interest that those who had tried this approach were writing that often, this dialogue was based in narrative. Collins (1998), for example, notes that his interviews:

Comprise accounts of events together with attempts to interpret them on the part of interviewer and interviewee, but the process is haphazard and tentative. Rather than facts (which have an existence independent of the means of their discovery), such exchanges precipitate narrative: narrative that is emergent and indexical (p. 3).

Looking back now, such an approach seems almost obvious. If I wanted participants to tell their own stories in the way they wanted to tell them, I would have to think of them *as* individuals, with stories to share. And if they were to tell these personal stories, wouldn't they want to do this with someone who had his or her own stories to share? According to Fontana and Frey (1998), this is the essence of the open-ended interview approach – each party seeing the other as human, rather than just as their traditionally ascribed interactional roles. They write that “as we treat the other as a human being, we can no longer remain objective, faceless interviewers, but become human beings and must disclose ourselves, learning about ourselves as we try to learn about the other” (p. 73). In the context of my study, I felt that approaching the interview as an open-ended conversation would provide a way for me to walk along with the participants as they explored their life stories, without telling them which direction to follow.

Next, I began to look at a number of different approaches to open-ended interviewing – were there any that resonated with my understanding of the processes and possibilities of this method? One such approach was that described by Hollway and Jefferson (1997) as the *biographical-interpretative* method, which was first used by German biographers after World War 2, to investigate the stories of holocaust survivors and Nazi soldiers. The basic principle of this method was to allow interviewees to speak for themselves (and thus share their own frames of meaning and interpretation), rather than using more structured interviewing techniques (which would impose the interviewer's order on their experiences). The basic techniques of this method include using open-ended questions, eliciting stories rather than reports, avoiding 'why' questions (as these would encourage abstract rationalising and thus generalisation, rather than concrete stories of particular experiences), and following up using respondents' own phrasing and ordering of experiences (Hollway and Jefferson, 1997).

As Hollway and Jefferson (1997) describe it, the theoretical principle underlying this method is:

The idea that there is a "gestalt" (a whole which is more than the sum of its parts; an order or hidden agenda) informing each person's life that it is the job of biographers to elicit intact and not destroy through following their own concerns. (p. 60)

In this sense, I realised, I differed in intention from both the originators of the method, and Hollway and Jefferson. I didn't believe that life stories elicited through such an approach would reveal hidden orders or agendas that the participants themselves would not already be aware of – and even if they did, I am not a trained psychologist or psychoanalyst, and thus would most likely not be able to recognise or interpret them. I did believe, however, that certain aspects of this method would be useful as a way of eliciting accounts that demonstrated participants' own ways of telling and describing.

One such aspect was the importance given to participants' own pace in telling their story – Hollway and Jefferson (1997) write that in biographical-interpretative interviewing, “the interviewer’s technique involves not intervening until the interchange is handed back” (p. 62). In other words, the interviewer embodies the ‘good listening’ skills that Denzin (2001) described – or indeed, the skills of any good conversationalist – by following along with the speaker’s account of things before adding to this account. I also resonated with the use of very open questions – for example, in the work of the German biographers, only one question was asked: “Please, tell me your life story” (Rosenthal, cited in Hollway and Jefferson, 1997, p. 60). However, given that I wasn’t aiming to elicit a gestalt account from each participant, rather my aim was to take part in an interpretive conversation (and thus add my own interpretations and meanings during the interview), I realised that while this method would *inform* my approach to interviewing, it would not *be* my entire approach.

Indeed, my interview approach was informed by a number of other authors, in a number of ways. For example, from reading Mishler (1999), I understood that it would be important to interview participants more than once – because subsequent interviews “turn out to be particularly rich. Responses to the first interview may be clarified, elaborated, and sometimes changed in important ways” (Mishler, 1999, p. 150). In a second interview, participants would know what to expect from the technique, from me, and also what kind of information I was interested in. From reading Seidman (1998), I realised that each interview in a sequence could address a different topic or focus – for his three part interview series moves from a focus on the past in the first interview, to a focus on the present in the second, and a focus on the meaning of the interview work in the third interview. From reading Clandinin and Connelly (1994), I realised the importance of beginning each interview from some point of shared context – for example, in the first interview we would begin from the annal, which we had both already seen and interpreted. In the second interview, we would begin from the transcript of the first interview, and so on. It was time to begin my interview practice.

5. Interview practice

In practice, I decided upon a three-interview structure, with each interview addressing a different area of focus, but the same fundamental purpose – to provide a context for the sharing and interpretation of each participant’s life story. In the first interview, I asked each participant to tell me about the events and experiences that had helped him/her to see him/herself in the way that he/she did now. In other words, I asked participants *how* they came to the present, rather than *who* they were in the present. I also began this first interview with quite a lengthy introduction – where I set out how I interpreted the interview situation (as a conversation rather than a monologue, where data were *produced* not *collected*), how I interpreted my role in the interview situation (as a listener, who would be guided by what they had to say), and the purpose of this particular interview (to fill in the annal in more detail, to begin to explore how they saw themselves, through the lens of their life experiences). I offered participants the suggestion that we could start where they had started on their annals, and move forwards from that point, both as a way of beginning the process, and of reminding participants that we had some shared understanding of their life stories that we could work from.

Initially, this was my ‘schedule’ for the interview as a whole – no list of questions, just this introduction setting out the context. However, as a result of piloting this approach, I also decided to bring to this first interview a list of topics and events, taken from each person’s annal, which I could use to prompt him or her. As well as providing a sense of momentum and focus, these prompt topics also seemed to help in establishing a relationship with participants, as they realised that it was genuinely *their* stories I was interested in, rather than a generic ‘teacher’ experience. Hollway and Jefferson (1997) noted something similar occurring in their research, where in their second interview, “interviewees warmed to the whole event and to the interviewer because they experienced being paid attention to and taken seriously through their own, self-styled account” (p. 66).

In the second interview, our focus shifted to an interpretation of the present context. I introduced this focus to the participants by telling them that the purpose of the second interview was to set the context of who they were now, and to look at their experiences within this context. I then reiterated that through the interviews, I hoped to hear their stories, about their experiences and the significance of these in terms of their identities. There were three main sections in the second interview – first, I asked participants to tell me about their current context (their impressions of the school in which they were teaching, and so on). Second, I asked them to tell me about the experiences in this context that seemed important to them. In these first two sections, then, I intended to continue to develop the life stories of the participants, shifting our focus from past to present. In the third section of this interview, our focus shifted to interpreting the stories already shared. To enact this shift, I presented each participant with a number of preliminary ‘themes’, that I had created by reading over the material shared to this point. I asked them to comment on these themes – either developing them further, or helping me to refine them – and then gave them the opportunity to question me about how or why I had developed them. I was initially quite unsure about this section – I wondered whether it would change the nature of our relationship. I wondered if this was really just returning to a more traditional interview method, where I would provide the stimulus, and participants – like rats attached to electrical wires – would ‘respond’. I wondered whether my ‘themes’ would offend participants, or whether participants would just assume that I was ‘right’, and then try to justify my interpretation.

In practice, though, this section was often where the interview really became a conversation. Perhaps because the material was their own lives – a subject in which they were obviously the experts – the participants were quite comfortable with challenging my suggestions, or asking me to clarify or justify what I had said. They would disagree, and more importantly, they would say why they disagreed. Sometimes, often even, they would agree with what I had said, and provide further stories along this same plotline. One contributing factor was perhaps that I explained very carefully to participants that I was not giving them *answers*, but rather I was trying to identify some

patterns in the stories they had told of themselves and their lives. As such, we were able to focus this conversation on the stories, rather than on the participants themselves.

Before the third interview, I asked participants to do several things. First, I asked them to go back over the transcripts of the first two interviews, and their initial stories and annals. I asked them to highlight or underline the sections (whether it be something they said, something I said, or a sections of dialogue) that they thought were important, in terms of how they saw themselves now. I told them that I would also do this. Second, I asked them to bring with them to the interview an object, which they felt had been important to them, either personally or as a teacher.

In my introduction to the interview itself, I again talked to each participant about the purpose and structure of our conversation. This time, I explained to participants that the purpose of the third interview was to reflect on the meaning of our work together, and the meaning of the experiences they had shared. Again, there were three parts to this interview. First, I asked participants to talk about the first task I had asked them to complete – identifying important sections of data from our work together. We talked about which sections they had selected, and why they selected them. In the second part of the interview, we talked about the sections of data that I had selected, in the same way. Both of these parts proved to be very effective, as a way of continuing the interpretive conversation and dialogue. In the final part of this interview, I asked participants to show me the object they had selected, and to tell the story associated with it. I was attempting to use these objects as a way of encouraging a different type of reflection from participants, accessing a different type of story, based in the particular and the concrete (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994). As well as exploring the memories generated by particular objects, this third part of the interview often served as an effective conclusion to the interview process – having explored the past, present, and potential future for each participant, the objects often provided an effective metaphor for the journey to date.

With interviews complete, the data production with each participant was also complete. However, the interpretive conversation – the next stage in the journey – was just beginning.

6. Relating differently

We need to do more than simply change our methods of interviewing. We must find ways to enter into partnerships with our subject-collaborators, reconstructing our perspective on science and research and turning it into a joint enterprise.

(Mishler, 1999, p. 152)

I am aware that in many research projects, the completion of data production signals the end of the interpretive relationship between researcher and participants. Certainly, the researcher may show participants transcripts, or copies of the writing done about them, but this is often done for the purposes of member ‘checking’ – to verify the ‘accuracy’ of reports, but not of the researcher’s analysis and interpretations. In this project, I took a different view of the relationship between researcher and participants. Indeed, given my focus on participants’ own interpretations of their lives and experiences, I didn’t see how I could do otherwise.

I had already attempted to expand the interpretive work of the research, by including participants in the process of identifying important sections of data, and discussing why these sections might be important. But I wanted this to be the start of our research relationship, not the relationship itself. I wanted to know what research might actually be able to achieve with and for participants, if I extended our relationship. What might happen if participants were allowed to not just ‘check’ my interpretations and representations of them, but also challenge, question, and respond to these interpretations? How, if at all, would they benefit from what I did with their life stories? These questions, and my ongoing relationship with each participant, became important during the next stages of the research process – analysing, writing, and responding.

4.

The interpretive conversation: Methodology (2)

1. Moving on

To recognise the role of perspective and vantage point, to recognise at the same time that there are multiple perspectives and multiple vantage points, is to recognise that no accounting... can ever be finished or complete. There is always more (Greene, 1988, p. 128).

This was where the journey became complicated. While planning and implementing my research had been a challenging and rewarding process, it had also been relatively linear – with the theory leading to the plan, and the plan leading to the practice. Analysing the data produced through the annals, initial stories, and interviews would prove to be less clearly defined. Although there had been a clear end point in the process of producing data, there would be no such ending in the analytic journey. Let me begin by discussing how I initially intended to (and did) analyse the life stories of each participant, and then introduce some of the tensions that disrupted this process.

2. Continuing the interpretive conversation

To some extent, I think I had taken for granted what would come next in the research process. I would look at the stories of the participants, to explore what they were telling me about their experiences and identities, and come to some understanding of how they saw themselves. After all, wasn't this the point of analysis – to render raw data meaningful, and reveal relevant information, in light of the questions asked? But this project – of exploring and interpreting the meanings that others ascribed to what had become data (that is, their lives) – would not be this simple.

Like Tierney (1998), “My goal is not to analyze chunks of speech to discover the inner life worlds of the interviewee in a coherent format” (p. 67). I didn’t expect to ‘discover’ hidden meanings after the data had been produced, by looking at *how* something had been said, rather than *what* was actually spoken about. For a start, I don’t think texts are that meaningful or revealing, particularly in the case of interview transcripts, which are already an abstraction from the original interview experience. Meanings don’t ‘emerge’ *from* texts – we give meaning *to* them. Nor do I think that the kind of linguistic analysis Tierney describes gives access to insights about anything other than the linguistic characteristics of this abstracted text. While these insights may well be valuable in many research projects, they would not answer the questions I wanted to ask of my data. Rather than undertake this kind of analytic project, where meanings are *found* in the data, I expected to *create* meaning through analysis. I expected to interpret and explore participants’ own meanings, rather than discover ‘the’ meaning of our work together. But what meanings would I create, and why?

To clarify this situation for myself, I revisited what it was that I hoped to achieve by working with these six teachers. First, I wanted to explore how they would describe their experiences and identities. Second, I wanted to explore how they would actually understand these lives and selves. In this sense, then, my analytic project was not to re-interpret their lives myself – to bring my interpretation of their experiences to the foreground. Rather, my task was to render meaningful participants’ *own* ways of interpreting their experiences. One way of looking at this purpose that I found useful was through the notion of framing. The participants had shared their experiences, and these were vitally important in the project – but they had presented these experiences within an interpretive ‘frame’. The frames around each experience, then, were the interpretations of the significance, relevance, and meaning of the particular event. If I wanted to look at the experiences, I would also see this frame. More importantly, if I wanted to understand, contextualise, and make these experiences meaningful for others, then I would have to render this frame meaningful as well.

I began this analytic project early in my work with each participant. Given that I was using the interviews to engage participants in an interpretive conversation (beginning in the second interview, when I started to share my thoughts about their life stories with them), I didn't see any way to leave the analysis until after the data had been produced. My first response, in sitting down to 'analyse' the first interview with each participant, was an immense feeling of being overwhelmed by the task. During the interview process, I had been continually surprised by the openness and willingness of the participants – and occasionally by what they chose to share. The data were, in a word, 'rich'; detailed stories of experience, together with attempts to interpret these experiences. They were dense, complex, ambiguous, concrete, and sometimes vulnerable – in short, everything I had hoped for. Looking for ways to analyse these stories, to reduce them to a form where they would be meaningful and revealing in terms of the areas of focus described above, I was initially paralysed. It wasn't that they were meaningless – quite the opposite. There was *too much* meaning. Like listening to a complex, multilayered piece of orchestral music, I couldn't hear everything at once. To begin to create meaning from these stories, I would have to listen for each instrument separately – to hear the elements that combine to make the whole. I would have to find a way to 'filter' the stories, aware all the time that "any separation [is] a knowingly artificial and ad hoc move that we take to enhance perception" (Peshkin, 2001, p. 247).

My first approach to interpreting the stories of the participants, then, was to explore the use of themes or patterns, based on the details they had shared of their lives, which (I hoped) would help to make sense of the complexity of personal experience. However, I didn't want these themes to serve as objects, around which generalisations could be made. Rather, I wanted each theme to serve as a lens, which would sharpen or call attention to certain aspects of a participant's life story, while at the same time blurring other aspects. I realised that, like any heuristic device, these themes would limit and reduce the scope of meanings that would be accessible from each life story – an

unfortunate, but seemingly inescapable compromise. Peshkin (2001) writes of this situation:

*In any form of qualitative research, inseparability is inescapable:
Things are connected. We wrench them from their contexts
knowing that we do a disservice to their natural interrelatedness;
we must do this if we are not to be paralysed by the immense
complexity of the world of social phenomena. (p. 247)*

Before I began to formulate these themes, I spent some time reflecting on exactly what kind of themes I was interested in, and how these would help me (and others) understand the participants' frames of meaning. For a start, given that my focus was on the lives of particular teachers, rather than teachers in general, I decided to construct themes from *within* the data produced with each participant, but not *across* participants. In other words, when looking at the data produced with John Martin, I would focus on generating themes that were relevant to John. Although Emily Reade may have shared similar stories, this was incidental, and would not explicitly influence my development of themes related to John. As this example suggests, there were several themes that I applied to a number of different participants – but in each case, I spent time reading over the data related to each individual, to make sure I could justify this theme in relation to them.

Second, I thought about what kind of information I wanted to highlight through the creation of themes. I reminded myself that I wasn't trying to explain *why* these teachers were the way they were now – and as such, my themes should not be attempts to establish causal links in the experiences of each participant's life. Rather, I was asking *how* participants described themselves – and my themes, I felt, should reflect this area of interest. My analytic project was similar in this regard to MacLure's (1993b) investigation of teachers' professional identities: "Rather than trying to 'explain' teachers in terms of sociological, contextual, subject or occupational categories, the project described here looked at the categories which people chose in order to explain *themselves*" (p. 316). In looking for patterns in the participants'

accounts, then, I was looking for patterns of description and interpretation – significant ways in which they described themselves, and the kinds of events and experiences they seemed to view as significant.

How, then, did I actually construct the themes within the accounts of my participants? My method was, in principle, quite similar to that described by Eisner and Powell (2002), in their interviews with research fellows. They write that in identifying themes within participants' accounts, they did not do so in reference to explicit and universal criteria, but instead attempted to pay attention to the qualities of each interview text, using critical judgement to recognise its important features.

As in the approach described above, I read each interview with the intention of noticing its internal qualities and patterns, rather than comparing what was said to any external expectations I may have developed (through reading the literature, for example) about what I would find. I wanted the themes to be grounded *in* the lives and stories of participants, not simply applied *to* them. As a way of constructing themes through these initial readings, I applied Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) concept of the three-dimensional inquiry space (p. 50). According to this conceptual framework, which is derived from Dewey's philosophy of experience (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002, p. 339), data can be read through three lenses – interaction, continuity, and situation – each of which is based upon a dimension of experience. For example, reading through the lens of interaction “involves both the personal and social. The researcher analyzes a transcript or text for the personal experiences of the storyteller as well as for the interaction of the individual with other people” (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002, p. 339). In reading through the lens of continuity, on the other hand, “the researcher analyzes the transcript or text for information about past experiences of the storyteller. In addition, it is analyzed for present experiences illustrated in actions of an event or actions to occur in the future” (p. 339). This three-dimensional reading of texts leads to a focus on making meaning from the personal, temporal, and contextual aspects of experience. These experiential terms – interaction, continuity, and situation – provided an initial structure for my reading and interpretation,

within which I could begin to identify themes in terms of how participants made sense of their experience, and explained themselves.

Once I had read each interview transcript several times, I began to form a list of potential themes, derived from these three dimensions. How did a particular experience relate to those that had been described beforehand, and those that were described later? Were there temporal connections? Were there connections through a common context or situation? And which experiences did not seem to be coherent or connected? Having made sure that any themes I constructed were supported by what participants had actually said, I read the transcripts again, this time using these themes, rather than the three dimensions of experience described above, as my heuristic devices – what insights into participants’ ways of describing and interpreting their experiences did each provide?

At the same time, I tried to remain aware of what was *excluded* by these themes – because as with any filter, themes only illuminate certain aspects of experience, and often do so at the expense of other, less clearly defined aspects. As Richardson (in Richardson and Lockridge, 1998) says, many researchers “are trained to follow a particular theme and to exclude all that is extraneous..., to slice off that which is not about the theme. I think it might be interesting if we invited minor themes, minor characters, minor asides, minor stuff, within our texts” (p. 333). By paying attention to these minor themes, and the marginal experiences which didn’t seem to ‘fit’ within any particular pattern, I hoped to remain open to the possibilities of redefining or reinterpreting my heuristic devices in subsequent interviews and readings. After all, “a thematic phrase does not do justice to the fullness of the life of the phenomenon. A thematic phrase only serves to point at, to allude to, or to hint at, an aspect of the phenomenon” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 92).

In addition to carrying out this analytical work on my own, I invited others into the interpretive conversation. After I had transcribed each interview, I gave a copy of this transcript to the participant who had engaged in the original dialogue, and also to my doctoral supervisor. Before meeting with

the participant to undertake the next interview, my supervisor and I would meet to discuss the themes we each had constructed in relation to this transcript. Often, we would identify similar, or complimentary themes – where we had described a similar pattern (or employed a similar heuristic device), using different terms. Sometimes, however, we would also identify different themes, and in these situations, our interpretive conversation would become overt, each of us discussing how a particular theme had been constructed, and in response to which qualities of the original text. As with any dialogue, the object of this exercise was not to combine our voices and create a monologue, rather it was to explore the various similarities and differences, to define the interpretive ‘scope’ of a particular text, and to explore the heuristic potential of various themes.

In the third interview with each participant, I asked them to enter this interpretive conversation, first by discussing the themes they had identified in the earlier transcripts, and then by responding to themes I presented to them. I was aware that, as Borland (1991) notes:

The performance of a personal narrative is a fundamental means by which people comprehend their own lives and present a ‘self’ to their audience. Our scholarly representations of those performances, if not sensitively presented, may constitute an attack on our collaborators’ carefully constructed sense of self (p. 71).

For this reason, I explained to the participants that my interpretations were not based on them as people, but on the stories we had shared. As such, we were discussing our interpretations of a shared ‘object’ (the interview text), rather than a personal ‘subject’ (the interviewee him/herself). Again, the most engaging dialogue often arose from discussing the differences between our interpretations, rather than the points of connection. Reflecting on this now, I realise that this was the real value of expanding the interpretive dialogue. By talking with participants and my supervisor, I was able to conceptualise the

themes we developed as uncertain, partial, and fluid – ways of exploring, rather than explaining, the interview data.

However, this interpretive work with each participant – quite literally a conversation – had a clear end point. After the final interview, it would be up to me to resolve any interpretive tensions, to work through any differences in our perspectives on the data. Ultimately, I didn't see any way to avoid this – given that I would be writing the research text, and claiming it as my work. Having walked this far on the journey with others, it seemed that I would have to continue alone. Perhaps owing to the collaborative nature of my project to this point, I was uncomfortable about having the final word, about having listened to the participants in relation to their lives, but not in relation to my texts about their lives. I was also uncomfortable with the thought that I would now have to 'close' my analysis and begin writing. Was there any way, I wondered, to keep this dialogue – this questioning of the data and my interpretation of it – open? Was there any way to invite others to continue walking with me on this journey?

3. Doing and writing

Although we usually think about writing as a mode of "telling" about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of "knowing" – a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable
(Richardson, 2000, p. 923).

I began to realise that the main tension I was now encountering was that I still saw analysis and writing as fundamentally different and separate tasks. I assumed that I would, at this point, 'complete' my analysis, and then write about my 'findings'. But as my conversations with my supervisor and the participants had illustrated so vividly, the analysis of my data had been carried out by human beings, over time – and as such was an interpretation rather than

an explanation of this data, open to revision and change. If my analysis revealed heuristic possibilities rather than universal truths, then it made sense to me that these possibilities should remain unfixed, unsettled.

Rather than viewing this as a problem, a potential shortcoming of my approach, I began to think of this as a strength. Instead, the problem was my assumptions about the processes of analysing and reporting results. I first began to realise that these were assumptions, not requirements, when I read Laurel Richardson's work. In particular, I was struck by the following comment: "I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I did not know before I wrote it" (Richardson, 2000, p. 924). Reading these two sentences effectively led me to re-story my thoughts on the entire research writing process – shifting from a focus on the end goal, to a focus on the process. I stopped thinking about how I could most effectively transmit predetermined information, and started thinking about how information is both shaped by, and an influence on, the particular methods of transmission. Rather than simply report meanings that had been interpreted and resolved elsewhere, might the research text offer the chance to reinterpret and explore? This echoed how I had felt about my analysis – that although constructing and reflecting on the themes relevant to each participant had been extremely valuable, this process was not yet complete. I wasn't yet ready to write about what I *had* found.

By coming to see writing as a method of inquiry, then, I felt I could approach the research text as a process – a way of learning more about what had been said, and what could have been said, about each person's life story. Rather than resolving my analytic questions and then writing about these answers, I could write about the questions themselves, and use this process almost as a method of analysis in its own right. The interpretive conversation could continue – although this time, it would be a conversation between my initial thematic interpretations, and the research text.

4. Restorying the data

From reading various descriptions of the processes of narrative data analysis, (cf. Polkinghorne, 1995; Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002), I was able to map out three major ‘steps’ that I wanted to take in my analysis journey. I had already taken two of these steps. First was the generation of narrative data with each participant, a process which, as I have described earlier, was itself a way of filtering and rendering meaningful their experiences and lives. Second was the paradigmatic analysis of this data, where the participants, my supervisor and I had sought “to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 13). It is important to note that my application of this technique was different to that described by Polkinghorne (1995), in that my purpose was to understand and make meaningful particular elements of *each* of the life stories shared, and not necessarily to “generate general knowledge from a set of particular instances” (p. 14).

Having taken these steps, however, I realised that I was not satisfied with the destination, or the prospect of having to write from this location. In his description of narrative methods of data analysis, Polkinghorne (1995) suggests that for a number of qualitative projects where the researcher’s purpose is to generate paradigmatic knowledge through narrative, these first two steps are sufficient. Given that I was addressing a different purpose, however, and a different form of knowledge, I realised that I would need to go further in seeking and creating meaning from my data. What I wanted to do next was move these common elements back into the context of the complex experiences and understandings of each participant. I needed to “understand individual persons, including their spontaneity and responsibility, as they have acted in the social world” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 19). As such, the third step in my analytic journey was to employ both the data and the elements I had drawn out from this data as the basis for *narrative construction* (Barone, personal communication, June 25, 2002). As Polkinghorne (1995) says, “in this type of analysis, the researcher’s task is to configure the data elements

into a story that unites and gives meaning to the data as contributors to a goal or purpose” (p. 15). In my case, the stories needed to be presented as contributing to each participant’s sense of who they were now, and their sense of how this identity had developed.

The practical link between the seemingly separate processes of analysis and writing, I realised, would be this process of *restorying* (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002, p. 330) each participant’s interview data. As Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) write, restorying “includes more than description and thematic development” (p. 330). In order to write about the journey that I had shared with the participants, while at the same time incorporating the understandings and meanings generated through the analytic procedures, I would have to *retell* each person’s life story. I wouldn’t be able to just cut and paste interview transcripts, but would actually have to rework and restructure the stories each person had shared. I restoried and filtered the participants’ life stories through the themes and patterns I had constructed, and also through the three dimensions of experience described earlier. That is, within the stories that made up each particular theme, I looked for patterns of time, patterns of interaction, and contextual patterns, that might work as ways of structuring the textual version of the life story.

In this sense, the process of restorying was not about separating out the various experiences described by each participant. Rather, as Polkinghorne (1995) writes, this process “is actually a synthesizing of the data” (p. 15). As such, writing about my research would not simply be a process of reporting *on* these themes, but would instead focus on each participant’s story, as this story could be told *through* them. In other words, I wanted to focus in my writing on what the themes would be able to show about each participant’s life, rather than what each participant’s life would add to the themes. My purpose in restorying the thematic elements of each participant’s life story was to “reveal [the] uniqueness of the individual case or bounded system and provide an understanding of its idiosyncrasy and particular complexity” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15).

Over time, I began to think of this restorying process as a method of creating dialogue, between the products of my thematic analysis, the experiences these themes were based on, and the emerging research text. Moreover, I began to think of this dialogue primarily as an *aesthetic* interaction between these three elements, which I was both structuring and observing. Let me elaborate. There were two features of my approach that led me to describe it as fundamentally aesthetic in nature: first, an attentiveness to – and experimentation with – the interaction between these three elements, and between the ‘part’ and the ‘whole’; and second, a focus on exploring and representing particular qualities of the text that did not seem to be guided by any particular rules of logic. Both of these, I now recognise, are features of what Anne Sullivan (2000) describes as *aesthetic vision* (p. 220). To speak of working with aesthetic vision, she writes:

*...suggests a high level of consciousness about what one sees...
Aesthetic vision engages a sensitivity to suggestion, to pattern, to
that which is beneath the surface as well as to the surface itself.
It requires a fine attention to detail and form: the perception of
relations (tensions and harmonies); the perception of nuance
(colors of meanings), and the perception of change (shifts and
subtle motions). (p. 220)*

In the arts, examples of working with aesthetic vision are seemingly common. In my experience, it is extremely difficult, for example, to actually create a painting without attending to each new line, or colour, or texture, and what this particular change implies for the work as a whole. In creating a painting, one must attend to how the detail shapes the form, while simultaneously being aware of how the form alters the new detail. Every new line in a poem alters the meanings of what has already been said, and suggests what might be said next. At the same time, this line builds upon what has already been created – simultaneously recreating and being bound within its context.

Thinking about these processes, I soon began to realise that working with aesthetic vision was not only applicable in relation to creating arts works. It

was just as applicable as an approach to conducting and interpreting research. Researchers with aesthetic vision, writes Sullivan (2000), “perceive the dynamics of a situation and know how to ‘read’ it. They look at the details within their contexts, perceive relations among the parts and between the parts and the whole... They construct forms and suggest meanings” (p. 221). As I restoried each participants’ experiences, I tried to remain attentive to pattern, suggestion, and the relationship between the part and the whole. I initially began the process of restorying with each participant by constructing narrative accounts of particular experiences which I felt embodied the themes I had identified. While I was constructing these narratives, I attended to some key questions – *what did each experience add to this overarching theme? What seemed to be binding particular stories together? Was it the theme as I (or the participants) had described it, or was it something else?* In other words, I attended to how each experience I was restorying embodied a particular theme, and also how it reinscribed this whole. Sometimes, this led me to revise a *part* – changing the focus on a particular experience or story. Sometimes, it involved changing the *whole* – and revising a particular theme, or the place of a theme in the research text.

Within this aesthetic dialogue, the three elements – theme, experience, and text – were held in a subtle and constantly shifting relationship. I began to see this relationship as analogous to the relationship between the constituent elements of the aesthetic languages of various arts forms (an idea I have discussed earlier). In drawing, for example, line and shade can be combined in numerous ways to create different effects within the ‘whole’ of a particular work, to create or communicate a certain meaning. It may also be the case that these meanings cannot all be planned in advance – but by working with aesthetic vision, the artist is able to pay attention to the impact of particular combinations, to observe these effects and make decisions about which combination is the most suitable or effective.

While I would set this dialogue in motion in my work by introducing particular combinations of experience and theme, I found that these interactions provoked and conveyed a range of new and sometimes

unexpected meanings through the medium of the research text. Working with aesthetic vision, then, enabled me to focus on the process as well as the outcome, to make decisions about which meanings would be most suitable, and to acknowledge the importance of these discoveries: “aesthetic vision does not assume that what one sees in the moment is what one will always see. It perceives the potential for transformation within any apparent fixity” (Sullivan, 2000, p. 221). Interestingly, it was most often the themes that I revised through this process, rather than the way I had storied a particular experience, or the importance I had assigned to it. In this sense, I was reminded of what author Raymond Carver (1994) writes about his mentor John Gardner: “It was a basic tenet of his that a writer found what he wanted to say in the ongoing process of *seeing* what he’d said. And this seeing, or seeing more clearly, came about through revision” (p. 43). Through writing within the structures of certain themes or patterns, I often understood more about why the participants and/or I may have made these connections between specific experiences in the first place. I saw more about the participants and their ways of describing themselves, by observing how I was describing them in the text. In other words, I saw more – about the experiences participants had described and the themes we had used to interpret these experiences – and I saw more clearly how I wanted to represent these meanings through the research text.

One consequence of this process was that I came to believe that data analysis was, in a sense, a search for *truth*. I had earlier rejected this term, equating truth with the search for answers, and the reduction of exactly the kind of uncertainty that I wanted to explore. And indeed, in certain definitions of truth, this is clearly the implication. Truth is defined as conformity with fact; agreement with reality; the actual state of the case; the matter or circumstance as it really is. Given that I don’t believe that reality is ever knowable in any kind of objective form, I couldn’t justify searching for this kind of truth in the stories the participants had shared. These definitions of truth imply a kind of universality – that once located, these understandings will always be the same, and always ‘accurate’, as long as reality itself remains fixed and constant. But given that our knowledge of reality is itself a construction – a kind of

synthesis between the objective features of the world, and our personal ways of knowing these features – I didn't see how truth could be any more universal than what it is referenced against. In other words, if we only know if something is 'true' by its correspondence with reality, then we are making an assessment based on our own personal construction *of* reality. Truth, therefore, is also a construction, drawn from experience as much as applied to it.

Rather than trying to tell *the* truth, then, my task was to tell *my* truth, and allow readers to assess the worth of this interpretation in light of their own perspectives on the world. Instead of trying to explain the participants' stories and understandings, I could focus on suggesting, enacting, and expressing the meaning I had personally made in reference to participants' ways of knowing. Interestingly, I noticed that some writers link this personal, contextual notion of truth to narrative. Bochner (2001), for example, notes that "it is not the 'facts' themselves that one tries to redeem through narrative tellings. Rather, it is an articulation of the significance and meanings of one's experiences" (p. 153). In this way, by working with the aesthetic elements of the research text, and how these interacted with the particular stories I was constructing, I could provoke the reader into questioning my truths, exploring my meanings, testing their believability and application – and thus encourage them to understand participants' life stories more personally and actively. I came to believe, in other words, that at least part of my role as a researcher was to search for, and share, truth – but I had come to attach quite a different meaning to this role. Instead of a universal truth, through the aesthetic dialogue I had created a narrative truth, in the sense that "narrative truth seeks to keep the past alive in the present. Stories show us that the meanings and significance of the past are incomplete, tentative and revisable" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 745).

However, perhaps the most significant consequence of this aesthetic dialogue was that I began to see the data differently. Richardson (2000) writes that in "trying out evocative forms, we relate differently to our material; we know it differently. We find ourselves attending to feelings, ambiguities, temporal sequences, blurred experiences, and so on" (p. 931). I found new

complexities in what the participants had said – new contradictions, new coherences and new disjunctions. I noticed experiences that I had overlooked before – minor themes, minor characters. I also found new complexities in my thematic understandings. While some themes had appeared very useful as a way of highlighting particular patterns within the interview texts, I would quickly discover whether they were also as useful in the research text. For example, in first interpreting John Martin's stories, I had constructed a theme around the notion of gender – 'being a male' was a phrase John often returned to. However, in trying to restory this theme, and represent it in the research text, I quickly realised that it wasn't being 'male' that John was describing – it was being an outsider. While at times he was an outsider by virtue of his gender, this theme became much richer and more complex in the research text than I had initially planned. This was where I really began to think *with* the themes, rather than just *about* them. And with these new complexities, came new tensions.



By thinking with and through the themes I had constructed with each participant, I realised that I was reaching a new point in my research journey. I had moved on from issues of analysis, and was heading towards the task of sharing the results of this analysis with others. Perhaps most importantly, I began to see my role as writer as an extension of my role as researcher, rather than a new position with a new purpose or responsibility. As a writer, I realised, my role was not to transform the interpretive conversation that the participants and I had shared into a monologue. Rather, it was to invite a new participant to share in our dialogue – the reader.

5. Writing lives

How do I proceed? Do I record lives as if there is an inner logic that makes sense to me, or do I try to come to terms with the differences and inconsistencies and in doing so risk creating a

text that may not be understandable to readers and that may not be publishable in academic journals? (Tierney, 1998, p. 53)

In thinking about how I would approach the writing task, my point of departure was again, a “question of purpose” (Barone, 2001b, p. 151). My question this time, though, was not a re-evaluation of my goals and processes. Rather, my question related to how I could write a *doctoral thesis*, with its accepted five or six chapter structure, in such a way that every part of this work would be consistent with my intentions. In other words, I wondered whether it would even be possible to write a thesis where every chapter would serve to raise questions, suggest multiple meanings, and enhance the possibilities for dialogue about important educational issues. I wondered whether I could present my work in such a way that the reader would learn *with* me about these things, and about the lives and identities of a number of drama teachers, or whether they would have to learn *from* me. In this step of the journey, then, I would like to discuss how I came to tell this story – first, by discussing how I came to tell the stories of the six teachers who walked with me.



Stories, then, like the lives they tell about, are always open-ended, inconclusive and ambiguous, subject to multiple interpretations. Some are big; others are little. Some take on heroic, folktale proportions in the cultural lives of group members; others are tragic; and all too few are comic. Some break fast and run to rapid conclusions. Most slowly unwind and twist back on themselves as persons seek to find meaning for themselves in the experiences they call their own. (Denzin, 1989, p. 81)

From the very beginning of my research journey, I had accepted that certain aspects of my research text would most likely need to be presented in a linear, declarative format. However, as I started analysing the data, I began to

question whether this would be the best way to present the life stories of each of the six participants. After all, there was more at stake in their stories than just whether the text would make sense. At stake was everything we had worked to produce and understand – that is, not just the participants’ stories, but also our interpretations of the significance and meanings of these stories. Not just the patterns and themes in these accounts, but also the inconsistencies and contradictions. Not just the answers, but also the questions. The participants’ stories were, as Denzin describes above, open-ended, ambiguous, and inconclusive. To me, this was their strength – for in these gaps lay the possibilities of multiple interpretations, multiple meanings. But how could I represent their life stories in such a way that these qualities were promoted?

If I was to write within the structures of the traditional doctoral thesis, I didn’t see any way this could be done. If I was to write a ‘results’ chapter followed by a ‘discussion’ chapter, for example, I would end up with the kind of report that I had already encountered in other work – theory separated from the personal, contextual knowledge of participants, themes more important than individual lives. I realised then, that to follow this structure was to follow a particular approach to constructing knowledge. As Bochner (2001) writes, there are risks in transforming stories into concepts or theories in the interests of this generalised knowledge. The major risk is that in this process, “we run the risk of rupturing what makes them stories. Then, the characters aren’t people caught up in life’s conflicts, difficulties, and moral contradictions” (p. 140). In other words, by following a traditional approach to representing knowledge, we lose the focus on the individual – and more importantly, what *makes* participants individual people – that is, their particular concerns, understandings, and contradictions. Rather than let the format dictate what I could say about my research, then, I decided to let what I wanted to say dictate the structure of my thesis. If, as MacLure (1993a) writes, there is “a lot more variability in the identities that people fashion for themselves, than we are always willing to recognise for research purposes” (p. 382), then I felt it was time to focus explicitly on this variability.

I also decided not to include a separate discussion chapter – a section in which I would ‘explain’ the connections between the lives of the participants, or where I would contrast what each had said with appropriate literature. I didn’t want to use theory in this abstract, decontextualised way, separate from the contexts in which it was most relevant. I wanted my readers to focus on the stories, to generate meanings from within these contexts. As Bochner (2001) argues:

We shouldn’t prematurely brush aside the particulars to get to the general. We can call on stories to make theoretical abstractions, or we can hear stories as a call to be vigilant to the cross-currents of life’s contingencies. When we stay with a story, refusing the impulse to abstract, reacting from the source of our own experience and feelings, we respect the story and the human life it represents. (p. 132)

However, the omission of a discussion chapter from my thesis does not suggest an accompanying omission of theory in relation to the participants’ stories. Rather, I decided to weave the theory I had drawn upon to help make meaning of each participant’s story throughout his or her individual chapter. This seemed to me to be a more effective approach (given the purposes of my work) to using theory, whereby the theoretical insight was shown arising *from* each participant’s life story, at times highlighting certain aspects of his or her experiences, other times contrasting with, or providing another viewpoint on, what was said. By occasionally combining the specific and concrete details of each participant’s life with the overarching and general information of the literature, I was attempting to construct a *conversation between literature and life* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 42). As in any true conversation, I wanted the speaking partners to be equal and open to interchange and response – and thus in this thesis, the theory is connected to, rather than set apart from, the lives and words of the participants. This I felt, would be a way of using theory contextually and personally. It would be a way of using theory to further understand an individual life as it is lived and described, rather than using it to abstract and generalise away from its particulars. It

would be, I hoped, a way of using theory as a generative *understanding*, rather than as a declarative *overstanding* (Ellis and Flemons, 2002, p. 347), opening up the possibilities of the participants' texts, rather than explaining them away into categories and characteristics. Besides, as Barone (1995) writes,

Some stories deserve their own space, with inviolable boundaries surrounding the message that they attempt to convey in their chosen format and language. We do not always need, within the same textual breath, to deconstruct in another style and format the epiphanies they foster. Sometimes the conversation between writer, reader, and characters should be allowed to wane before additional voices inject themselves into the dialogue (p. 72).

Obviously, such an approach to writing about and understanding the lives of others had implications in terms of how the life stories would actually be constructed.



How, I wondered, could I actually structure these narratives, to achieve the purposes described above? What would it look like, to write another's story in such a way that readers would think with it, rather than about it? My work with these six teachers had extended and complicated the kinds of understandings I had developed through my earlier exploration of theories of identity, narrative, and memory. In short, the participants had confirmed very clearly that neither identity, nor the narratives we tell to develop it, are atemporal or unified. There seemed to be no permanence in identity, no 'coherence' in a traditional sense. As I suggested might be the case earlier in reference to the literature on identity, none of these people could chart a clear and linear progression, from who they had been, to who they were now. Instead, they moved back and forwards in time, tracing multiple paths to the present, each of which contributed in some way to who they had become. As Barone (1997) notes, "the complex process of re-storying one's life rarely evidences a perfectly rounded, seamless structure. Instead, there are erratic

meanderings, jarring interruptions, chronological juxtapositionings, and so on” (p. 223). However, these six people *did* still seem to have a sense of who they were now, developed along these multiple, simultaneous plot lines – a ‘whole’, that was established through the interactions between these multiple ‘parts’. My task, then, was to find a way to represent these complex plot lines within the conventions of a story, to find a way, through this research text, to privilege this multifaceted narrative, and the “rhythm of combined fragments” (de Peuter, 1998, p. 41) that was its core.

As Polkinghorne (1995) describes it, the task confronting me was “to construct a display of the complex, interwoven character of human experience as it unfolds through time and as it stands out at any present moment through recollection and imagination” (p. 18). My own solution to this problem was to develop a narrative structure based directly on these understandings of narrative identity. This structure was complex, presented in a number of voices, a number of experiences and plot lines, that would sometimes support or reinforce each other, sometimes contradict or raise questions, but *always* work toward a sense of a whole, blending together to form identity. In a way, I wanted this structure to challenge readers, to make ‘familiar’ ideas about both narrative and identity ‘strange’, and thus open to reflective analysis and reinterpretation.

One of the most significant techniques of narrative structuring that informed the participant chapters in this research text was the cinematic method of montage. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe this technique:

Montage uses brief images to create a clearly defined sense of urgency and complexity. Montage invites viewers to construct interpretations that build on one another as the scene unfolds. These interpretations are built on associations based on the contrasting images that blend into one another. (p. 5)

Such a technique seemed particularly appropriate for my textual project – given that identity develops over multiple plot lines, perceived as a whole. In

a practical sense, then, in this text, as in many texts based on the metaphor of montage, “many different things are going on at the same time – different voices, different perspectives, points of views, angles of vision” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 5). This, it seemed, would be a structure that embodied the theoretical understanding of narrative and identity that I wanted readers to experience. It would also, I hoped, serve to disrupt ‘causal’ readings of participants’ experiences, as though identity development could be observed and charted sequentially or temporally, rather than observed as the ongoing, shifting combinations of a range of narrative fragments. In this text, then, each participant’s experiences are storied according to this principle. I have used the themes developed through each stage of the analytic process as a broad structuring device, and then within these themes, multiple experiences, voices, and perspectives are layered. The interplay and contrast from one element – experience, voice, or perspective – to the next is *suggested* through this process, rather than *explained*. My hope is that through engaging with these montages, readers will develop a richer, more complex understanding of identity as it is experienced, as well as understood.



While drawing upon the structure of montage informed the overall narrative structure of each participant’s life story as presented in the research text, the actual style of writing employed within this structure was informed by a range of genres and approaches. The first aspect of this style that I would like to explore is the use of multiple perspectives and voices.

Although most sections of the participants’ life stories are told in their voices, they are still written, and restoried, by me. Given this, I realised, I could reasonably expect readers to question whose voice they were actually encountering in the text. At the most fundamental level, my answer to this question is that the participants’ stories are told in many voices. Each chapter presents a range of these voices – some of which are clearly my own perspective, some of which belong to theorists, and most of which are, I believe, from the perspective of the participant. Just as I do not speak in one

voice to describe all of my thoughts and experiences, nor did the people I worked with in this project. Within a single life story, then, I attempted to create an interplay between these different perspectives – my own voice¹, in terms of what I was learning about teaching and identity through this journey; the voices of theorists², in places where the participant's stories either created or resolved theoretical issues or tensions; and finally the participant's voices – from within the experiences³, and from the context of the present⁴, reflecting back on these experiences.

My distinction between which sections 'belonged' to each of these textual participants was as simple as I could make it – it depended entirely on whose words I was using. In the first-person sections that I have attributed to the participants' voices, the words used are theirs. I may have adapted these sections from interview transcript, or from the participants' initial stories or timelines, but they *are* the participants' experiences, and their perspectives on these experiences. In the case of interview transcripts, this line may have become slightly blurred, given that I removed pauses, hesitations, false starts, and so on from their speech. My reasoning for these editorial decisions resonates with the words of Nespor and Barber (1995), who write:

We researcher-writers say of "faithful" transcriptions that "that's the way people really speak" ... but that is never completely true. People do not speak on paper. Transcripts are written forms, and when we freeze interview speech into print, we construct those we have talked to as subordinate writers: We make them look ignorant (p. 57).

I wanted to stand with the participants in the research text, not represent them as subordinate writers. Additionally, in the interests of creating a research text that was focussed and understandable, certain sections of the life stories

¹ Represented in-text in this visual format

² Indicated through use of conventional in-text referencing.

³ Represented in-text in this visual format.

⁴ Represented in-text in this visual format.

where specific experiences are described are occasionally composite descriptions, assembled from fragments of multiple interviews. Often, participants would return to the same experiences over the interview series, and rather than creating a text that was repetitive, I merged these various explorations into the one *textual* experience. However, the details – of actions, settings, and people – are always grounded in the descriptions provided by the participants. They have lived and thought through these things – I have not.



*Poems are theories,
carving scars of memory
into the world's body,
on the long spine of history* (Dunlop, 2002, p. 4).

At this stage, I was becoming very conscious that although these life stories, and particularly the first-person sections, represented the voices of the participants, certain interpretive decisions had been made. Ultimately, my analysis and restorying had governed which events would be described, and within which heuristic ‘frames’. In this sense, these life stories would be my representations of the participants’ voices, not the voices themselves. I needed, therefore, to find a way to speak *with*, rather than *for*, these teachers – to reveal my work as translator, aware all the time that “there are consequences inherent in any form; each form constrains while offering unique possibilities” (Dunlop, 1999, p. 16). In practice, I addressed this issue by attempting to expose the “construction scars” (Barone, 2001b, p. 163) of the text, intentionally allowing readers to access and question my interpretive and representational practices, the ‘frame’ as well as the content. Some of these scars are more clearly exposed than others – for example, the occasional use of third-person narratives, where I have talked *about* the participants’ experiences, or the use of multiple fonts and formatting devices to delineate differences in perspective.

However, one of the most commonly employed, and analytically ‘strong’ techniques I have employed to suggest my own particular readings of the participants’ experiences is the use of ‘poetic’ text. Throughout each life story, there are a number of short sections of text – particular descriptions of participants’ experiences or feelings – that are ‘broken up’ into a visual style that is reminiscent of poetry, with line breaks to emphasise rhythmic patterns of description and meaning, and to evoke a sense of the text as it was spoken. While I would hesitate to refer to the productions of this technique as poems, given that they do not approach the economy of style or the evocative possibilities of literary poetry, these sections, informed by poetry, did serve an important purpose in my work. As Richardson (1997) argues, poetic representations demand to be read differently to traditional social science writing. She writes that when reading poetic text:

Rather than being swayed into thinking we have the one and only true story here, the facticity of its constructedness is ever present. By violating the conventions of how sociological interviews are written up, those conventions are uncovered as choices authors make, not rules for writing truths. The poetic form, moreover, because it plays with connotative structures and literary devices to convey meaning, commends itself to multiple and open readings in ways that straight sociological prose does not (pp. 142-143).

Using poetic structures, then, was an attempt to engage readers in examining not only my interpretations of participants’ interpretations of their experiences, but also examining their own expectations of how a research text would convey meaning. By displaying the constructedness of these sections of text, I hoped that, as Richardson indicates above, readers would expand this questioning to the other representational practices I have used, and to the representational practices they would expect from a research text. As Eisner (1997a) notes, poetry is also a particularly evocative form of writing: “Poetry was invented to say what words can never say. Poetry transcends the limits of language and evokes what cannot be articulated” (p. 5). As such, poetic

representation seemed appropriate for my project, given my aim of opening up a range of possibilities about what it might mean to be a teacher, rather than reducing uncertainty about this important educational issue. Also, as Gergen and Gergen (2002) suggest, poetic representation brings both readers and researchers into different relationships with research participants, perhaps allowing me to speak alongside the participants in my representations of them, rather than usurping their words and meanings for my own purposes.

As I indicated earlier, along with these poetic representations, I have made use of a third-person, omniscient style of narration in several of the participants' life stories – where their experiences are quite clearly *re*-told and reinterpreted. Often, these were sections where the particular experience described had not been interpreted as significant by the participant – or at least had not been identified as such in our discussion – but that I believed were centrally important in the development of a particular theme. Rather than present these in first-person perspective, and thus at least partially 'mask' my own interpretation of the significance of these events within the participant's, I chose to present these experiences in a way that it would be clear to readers that I was speaking *about* participants in these short sections.

One further element of writing style that requires elaboration here is the inclusion of my own narrative, woven throughout the participants' life stories. Given that this is a text dealing with the lives of six teachers, and given that my own experience is not part of my research question, why have I included this personal narrative? Is this simply self-indulgence? However, given that one of my intentions in presenting these life stories was to allow readers to assess the usefulness of my interpretations, including myself as a character was one way of facilitating this process. By sharing my uncertainty, and the tentative nature of my knowledge, I become vulnerable in the text (as the participants of research always are) – or at least, my interpretation does. With vulnerability, comes the possibility that there may be other interpretations, other ways of seeing these stories. Thus, the interpretive possibilities are extended, rather than contained.

My personal narrative was also an attempt to subtly suggest or explore some of the ways in which these stories might have resonance, or metaphorical significance beyond the experience of the individual teacher. In this way, I do not make myself vulnerable for self-indulgent reasons – but rather, to enhance the possibilities for meaning within the text itself (Behar, 1996).

By highlighting certain features of my own experience that were challenged or reinterpreted in light of the participants' words and understandings, I hope to model a particular process of engagement with this research – one which produces more meaning in the interaction between multiple perspectives, rather than the achievement of a 'right', or final answer. It is my hope that the life stories will engage readers in a dialogue, between the experiences of their own lives and the meanings assigned to these experiences, and the understandings and questions raised in this text. Finally, the inclusion of my perspective – and indeed, the perspectives offered by various theorists – in these life stories is an attempt to develop a *polyphonic* (Bakhtin, 1973) research text.

A polyphonic text does not simply present multiple voices on the same topic or worldview – rather, it presents a range of perspectives, all of which are equally valid, and all of which are essentially irreducible. Rather than presenting *conclusions*, or certainties from the perspective of the author, the polyphonic text presents *interactions*.

According to Tanaka (1997), it is Bakhtin's belief that a polyphonic approach "which moves away from the author's controlling, authorial voice – and lets each character have his or her own voice – will be more able to represent the feelings and ideas of those characters" (p. 264). In this sense, polyphonic orientations allow characters to exist beyond the extent to which they simply represent the author's point of view. Readers are able to access and question not how these characters embody an author's perspective, but rather how they represent their *own* perspective and world of meaning. This in turn allows for the development of a more genuine dialogue, between writer, characters, and reader – because polyphony respects "the variety of languages found within

the dialogue between the author of a work, its various characters, and its readers” (Barone, 2001b, p. 156). Rather than simply accessing different perspectives on the author’s point of view, a polyphonic work allows space for new interpretation – for the reader to enter into the conversation and find new meaning in the interplay between different points of view.

In terms of its usefulness as an approach to representing research with others, it seems to me that polyphonic writing creates an opportunity to effectively speak *with* participants, rather than claiming to speak *for* them. Participants’ voices can be seen as more than just mouthpieces for the particular argument that a researcher wishes to put forward. Also, a polyphonic approach reduces the writer’s authority, as their position becomes as open to question and analysis as the other voices on display. As Tanaka (1997) also indicates, “a polyphonic novelistic writing allows the researcher to represent the multiple voices and emotions of a heterogeneous population in a more nuanced fashion than traditional reporting” (p. 289). In other words, this approach actually emphasises difference and individual perspective, rather than smoothing these over in the interests of the writer’s point of view. Polyphonic writing allows us to “discover and express the complexity, conflicts and surprises” (Tanaka, 1997, p. 289) that emerge as a result of entering into a genuine conversation with others about their lives.

How, then, is *this* research text polyphonic? As I have discussed earlier, I have attempted to include a range of voices and perspectives within each life story – my own, those of the theorists, and those of the participant him/herself. Each of these perspectives presents a position that is different from other perspectives – for example, when I write in my own voice, about my own experience, I express something that the participants did not. Similarly, many of the first-person sections that represent the participants’ points-of-view express a particular perspective or understanding about experience that I could not. However, opening up this range of perspectives within the text does not, I believe, automatically create a polyphonic text. After all, these different voices could all express the same worldview, make the same points about what it means to be a drama teacher. The polyphony in

this text, then, comes from the fact that these different perspectives, although at times *complimentary*, are in essence, *irreducible*. This text embodies a dialogue, with each voice representing a unique, equally valid perspective on the issues being discussed. For this reason, there is no ‘concluding’ section, in my voice as researcher/writer at the end of each life story – for such a section would essentially sabotage this developing conversation, rather than allowing it to continue in other contexts and texts. In other words, the presentation of multiple voices and perspectives is used here as a way of enhancing and representing *uncertainty* – the tensions and contradictions inherent in understanding the lives and worlds of others.

6. Dealing with ambiguity

I would not like to suggest that, in the interests of generating dialogue and polyphony, I have essentially created a text that can be read in *any* way. After all, as Barone (2001d) reminds us, any text must “reveal to readers, however subtly, the appropriate attitude with which it should be regarded. Otherwise, as Iser (1993) quite rightly notes, ‘inappropriate reactions will ensue’” (p. 738). As a researcher, I have a responsibility to guide, however subtly, the range of interpretive responses available to readers. How, then, could a text both advance understanding about important educational issues, and leave space for interpretation and imagination on the part of readers? Eisner (1997b) discusses the tension, between precision and productive ambiguity in research reporting:

In literary circles, ambiguity has a positive, constructive contribution to make to the overall character of the story. At the same time, ambiguity creates uncertainty regarding the phenomena to which the story refers, hence making it difficult for readers to know with reasonable precision the point being conveyed. I feel a tension in these two pulls: the pull toward precision and the pull toward the productive consequences of ambiguity. I have no way at this moment to resolve the tension. I only want to acknowledge the dilemma that I feel in wanting to

afford readers opportunities to imaginatively participate in the educational situations described without, at the same time, creating work that functions essentially as a Rorschach inkblot test. (p. 267)

In practice, my attempt to resolve this tension was to define some interpretive ‘boundaries’, but leave open the possibilities for multiple interpretations within this broad terrain. To establish these boundaries, and therefore structure and suggest the possible scope of interpretations, I framed each participant’s life story around a unifying theme. As Van Halen-Faber and Diamond (2002) describe it, this is the search for “the right connecting thread... we seek, as here, not just to assemble curiosities but to locate a candidate image, an intriguing symmetry, a compelling ‘something’ that can keep the inquiry together, summarising and making it accessible to others” (p. 255). These themes were, in a sense, an expression of the overall journey of each participant, how they had framed their stories throughout the research process. This theme was like the backbone of their life story, around which the other themes were organised. Narratively, these themes are represented in the ‘present’ voice⁵ of the participant, looking back on the experiences they have shared, reflecting on the emerging research text. Although the participants did not always directly identify this overarching theme in the initial interview series, I ensured that we discussed this theme once they had read the version of their life story presented in the research text. As Barone (2001b) writes, this central theme serves as “a *qualitative control* (Ecker, 1966), a means of determining the autobiographical details to be elicited and included in (and those to be ignored and excluded from) the developing story” (p. 168, emphasis in original) – a way of marking out the interpretive possibilities of the life story as a whole, guiding readers evocatively, rather than declaratively.

Ultimately, in writing and thinking about how I have presented the life stories in this research text, one fundamental question remains – *why*? That is, why

⁵ Represented in-text in this visual format.

experiment with different genres, voices, and perspectives? Why risk the ‘Rorschach’ condition, where the text is too open, and why risk creating a text that is unintelligible? After all, this is essentially an example of educational research, and the life stories are ultimately reports of ‘results’, forged from various ‘data’. Am I really just making points that “might just as well have been said in a traditional format” (Tierney, 2002, p. 391)? In other words, if the information I present is conventional (which, despite my focus on individual perspective, it is), why not just present it in a traditional format?

7. Design elements

To address this question, I would first of all like to reiterate that although the information presented follows somewhat traditional conventions of what one would expect to read in an educational thesis, my purpose in presenting this information (to invite the reader to enter the interpretive conversation) differs from traditional expectations. Let me now explore how I have promoted this active response from readers, and then conclude this section by examining the outcomes of this process.

As an example of arts-based narrative research writing, this thesis possesses many of the design elements commonly associated with this methodology. These include the use of contextualised language, the promotion of empathy, and the personal signature of the researcher/writer (Barone and Eisner, 1997). However, perhaps the most significant design elements of arts-based texts that I draw upon in this thesis are the use of expressive language, and the presence of ambiguity (Barone and Eisner, 1997, pp. 74-75).

In addressing the significance of these design elements in my own work, I would first like to return to an earlier discussion, about the ways in which arts works create and convey multiple meanings. In the introductory chapter of this thesis, I argued that in general, we access arts works through their aesthetic qualities – through the particular combinations of aesthetic elements that together, constitute that particular arts form. In drama, for example, we access a performance by engaging with the particular ways in which the artists

involved have shaped the elements of role, tension, mood, symbol, focus, and so on (Haseman and O'Toole, 1986). Parsons (1992) describes this process:

Creativity and artistry consist of thinking in terms of a medium, which is after all the very essence of the art form, the stuff that artworks are made of... Thinking consists of the discrimination and manipulation of the elements of that stuff, the response to their meaningful variations and nuances and to the constructions, combinations and qualities they make possible. Aesthetic response is very similar: it consists of reading the medium. (p. 72)

Arts languages, then, are organised *by* these aesthetic elements, and present meaning *through* them. For this reason, they may not be well-suited to declarative purposes, for as Smith (1989) notes, an aesthetic response is “unusually full and complete and avoids the narrow focus on practical purposes that is characteristically maintained during our nonaesthetic pursuits” (p. 36). In other words, we do not comprehend arts works in the same way that we comprehend an academic essay. Most often, we read an academic argument in terms of *what* it has to say, and how it corresponds to or extends what we know of an external world. In contrast to this, in arts works “meanings are constructed mostly in light of the *internal* relationships of elements of the work – their own inherent intensities, similarities, and contrasts” (Parsons, 1992, p. 75) – and thus arts works embody and express meaning. Just as an arts work is created aesthetically, then, so is our response to it. And in the process of interpreting the aesthetic relationships of an arts work, we come to *experience* the meaning of the work.

As I argued earlier, arts experiences offer a subtle pedagogy, teaching through experience and perception rather than explanation and declaration. While I would not go as far as formalist art critics in suggesting that content is irrelevant in arts works, I would certainly agree that form and content are both important in contributing to this aesthetic experience. As Reimer (1992) writes, aesthetic engagement “requires knowing about content, given the

contributory role content plays, but also... requires the ability to go beyond such knowing to the knowing of or within yielded by meaningful structure” (p. 34).

How, then, does an artist suggest a range of potential aesthetic interpretations, without simply telling an audience what to learn? For one thing, as Dewey (1934/1980) notes, artists *express* the meaning of their work (p. 84), rather than stating this meaning declaratively. And this act of expression, Dewey says, “signifies both an action and its result” (p. 82). It is not that artists do not wish to convey meaning – rather, they are conscious of both content and form, and of ways to shape and structure form to promote certain meanings. Indeed, it is by the very nature of their expressiveness that arts works are able to foster an active, heuristic response from an audience. As Dewey (1934/1980) writes, “Art throws off the covers that hide the expressiveness of experienced things... Because the objects of art are expressive, they communicate” (p. 104).

In addition, artists respect, and actively promote, the presence of ambiguity in their work. As Reimer (1992) notes, “the purpose of the structure of a work of art is to embody, through the use of perceptual qualities, implications, connotations, intentions, suggestions, possibilities” (p. 30). By dealing in the realms of possibilities rather than certainties, arts works *must* be responded to actively, heuristically. Interpretation becomes central to the process of making meaning, because “we must identify and interpret before we can perceive and recognise... The need for interpretation becomes greater when the object becomes unclear” (Parsons, 1992, p. 77). By playing deliberately in the margins, by suggesting rather than explaining, arts works defer final decisions about their meaning – and require that such decisions be made personally, by individual audience members. As Barone and Eisner (1997) write, then, the aim of promoting ambiguity is “not to prompt a single, closed, convergent reading but rather to persuade readers to contribute answers to the dilemmas posed” (p. 75). Through expressing rather than stating meaning, suggesting rather than declaring, arts works develop a unique and interactive relationship between artists and audiences. This is a relationship that respects

– indeed, requires – active, reflexive interpretation of both form and content. In this relationship, as it is focussed through aesthetic engagement with arts works, “new meanings are constructed, and old values and outlooks are challenged, even negated. When that occurs, the purposes of art have been served” (Barone and Eisner, 1997, p. 78).

Given the heuristic aims of my research, I believed that it was vitally important that my writing promote the kind of active interpretation and response from readers that I have just described. In this sense, then, the use of expressive rather than declarative language, and the presence of ambiguity, were central to achieving these aims. Although my approach to representing the lives and meanings of participants is one approach among many, it is nonetheless one which emphasises these characteristics, in both content and form. Expressive language is “consistently connotative, metaphorical, and evocative, rather than linear, denotative, or technical” (Barone, 2001d, pp. 739-740), and where possible, I have emphasised the former characteristics of participants’ speech, and my own writing. I have also attempted to structure the life stories evocatively, in the ways I have described earlier (such as the use of a central theme) – to express, rather than explain, certain understandings of the structure of identity itself – for example, moving cyclically in time and place, rather than in linear sequence. The individual themes which dictate the structure of each life story are illustrated, rather than explained – shown through the interplay of multiple experiences, voices, and perspectives.

Similarly, the life stories are an attempt on my part to use ambiguity productively – in the service of allowing readers to formulate their own questions and answers from the participants’ lives. Iser (1974) discusses what he calls *gaps* in written narratives – textual moments where “the narrative breaks off, so that the reader has room to enter into it” (p. 38). In interpreting a text with gaps, readers must fill in these gaps from their own experiences, thus entering into and engaging with the text imaginatively and personally. In other words, gaps require that readers provide their own meanings and

interpretations, which can be assessed against the initial text, but not sourced from it. The gaps:

Are those very points at which the reader can enter into the text, forming his own connections and conceptions and so creating the configurative meaning of what he is reading. Thanks to the "vacant pages," he can reflect, and through reflection create the motivation through which he can experience the text as a reality.
(Iser, 1974, p. 40)

In the life stories presented here, there are many of these gaps – where participants' experiences are described but not interpreted, or where they are interpreted but not described. There may be gaps between different experiences within one theme, or gaps across the entirety of a particular life story, encouraging readers to invest their own interpretations and experiences in the service of understanding and making meaning from the lives of these 'others'. In this sense, I was reminded of how Richardson (in Richardson and Lockridge, 1998) describes a good ethnography text: "A good ethnography text is a mystery story. Unlike science stories that tell all in the initial encounter, the abstract – why read on, except to debunk? – ethnographic texts can be written as a mystery – clues, plots, twists" (p. 335). Both of these features of the life stories – the presence of ambiguity and the use of expressive language – are essentially attempts on my part to open up the possibilities of the text, and to encourage readers to engage with each story in much the same way that they might engage with (or have) an arts experience – aesthetically, actively, and reflexively.

However, these life stories are still framed within the more conventional, researcher-dominated discussions of theory and method (such as this), which do not express meaning so much as state it declaratively. As such, the possibilities for readers to engage in an interpretive dialogue with my own understandings and methodological decisions are somewhat more limited, and thus subject to more conventional criticism. To use Bochner's (1997) terms,

these ‘framing’ chapters tend to force readers to think *about*, rather than *with* (p. 436) my journey as a researcher.

Nonetheless, I have made some attempts to remain consistent to these aesthetic purposes throughout the thesis – in the tone and structure of the final chapter, for instance, and through extending the interplay of multiple voices and perspectives throughout the thesis as a whole – but these are tentative steps, not bold strides. It is my hope, though, that such moves go some way towards encouraging readers to view my perspective (especially in relation to the lives and understandings of participants, but also to a lesser extent, in relation to the processes and purposes of this research) as simply that – *my own*.

8. Responding

Ultimately, it is the process of active engagement and interpretation that I have described above on the part of *all* involved that I believe will bring this text closest to fulfilling its aims of initiating a genuine conversation about what it might mean to be a teacher. It is my hope that this interplay of multiple voices and perspectives may “raise important questions about topics under discussion, challenging the reader to rethink the values that undergird certain social practices” (Barone, 2001b, p. 157), including the social practice of teaching. By structuring the text, particularly the life story sections, according to the aesthetic elements I have discussed, I am attempting to offer an open invitation to readers – to engage with this interpretive conversation as an active participant, rather than simply listen to my description of a conversation that has already happened, elsewhere.



*The private story is finished
but the journey
has
just
begun.*

Interlude:
Guide to reading the narratives

1. Fonts

As described in Chapter 4, the following fonts are used in Chapters 5-10 (the participants’ life stories):

1.	<i>This font is used to represent my own voice, as researcher and writer of the text, and as a person attempting to understand the issues involved in the study.</i>
2.	This font is used to represent the participants’ voices, within the experiences being described. It is also used in the third person sections, given that these are most closely aligned with the perspectives of the participants, and share the purpose of describing and illuminating experience.
3.	This font also represents the participants’ voices. In this case, this is the voice from the ‘present’, reflecting back on, and highlighting the meanings of, the experiences shared within each theme.

In addition to the above fonts, conventional in-text referencing is used throughout these chapters, in places where the participants’ narratives created, resolved, or illuminated theoretical issues or tensions.

2. The context

At the time of the interviews, all six of the teachers participating in this project were teaching in northern Tasmanian secondary schools, located around the area of Launceston. In order to provide some ‘grounding’ for these stories, I include here a brief description of this context.

The state of Tasmania, separated from mainland Australia by sea, has a population of approximately 472,000¹ people. Launceston is the second largest city in Tasmania (following Hobart), and has a population of

¹ Population statistics are from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

approximately 63,000 people. Within the Launceston city area, there are five public high schools (catering for students in Grades 7-10), two senior secondary colleges (catering for students in Grades 11 & 12), and four non-government secondary schools (catering for students in Grades 7-12). There are also two district high schools (catering for students from Kindergarten to Grade 10) within 50 km of Launceston.

Drama is a compulsory subject in Tasmanian high schools for Grade 7 (and often Grade 8) students. Following this, it is available as an optional subject for students in Grades 9-12. All six of the participants in this study were teaching in public schools at the time of their interviews, with three teaching at high school level, and the remaining three at college level.

5.

John Martin

It's a funny thing, and I think this is important, that life is about telling stories. That's a big statement because when you think about it, I come home from work, and I'll tell my wife what's been going on, and she'll tell me what she's been doing, or we might travel, and we come back and people want to know what we've been doing, or my child decides to shit the bed and I want to go and tell someone about it, or you might want to tell other people stories about drama teachers. Extend it any which way you like, it's all about telling stories, it's all about relating to one another, and inter-relating with people. (John, initial stories, p. 5)

1. Introduction

In the initial stages of the project, John dictated his story. This is what he said:

My story begins in Melbourne, where I was born in 1960. I was number five of seven children. Dad would work, and Mum would stay home and cook and clean and wash and care, while Dad was caring for us by 'bringing home the bacon'. It's significant that I'm one of seven children because when you're brought up with seven kids in a lower middle class family, you have to find ways of entertaining yourselves. A large part of that was playing sport, but the other part of that was when we would sit around as a family, mainly the kids watching television, exploring negotiation skills, and language skills, and how to persuade and cajole people to change the channels or nick down the street, or to give up some time to polish your shoes.

From a very early age, in order not to be taken advantage of by so many kids, brothers and sisters who were older than me, I developed a sharp mind, a sharp wit and a sharp vocabulary, and on reflection even those experiences as a child, growing up in a large family, helped to shape who I am now as a

drama teacher. I think I've got a sharp wit and a good vocabulary, because I had so much time negotiating and cajoling and persuading my brothers and sisters to do things for me, as well as being manipulated by them.

There are some other experiences, which on reflection, were a guide to the fact that I became a drama teacher. In Grade 1, the teacher was reading a book to us and we were all sitting cross-legged on the floor like good little children. When mum opened the door – she was on the women's auxiliary – to look at the class and to take our lunch orders, no one looked to the door. Mum looked in, and there I was, sitting there with my funny glasses on, with the plastic glasses, nose, and moustache. I didn't know that for about 25 years, until I went home one day and she related the story, much to everyone's mirth.

But also as a child I had my favourite toy, which I still have - a little puppet, called Bink. I could talk to Bink and Bink would talk back and Bink would serve justice if my brother came into my half of the bedroom. As a young boy, I remember requesting marionettes for my birthday presents. I had three of them, which brought me a lot of fun and lots of fun for other members of the family too because, along with one or two other brothers, I would put on puppet shows, which were great fun. I shared a room with my brother, and we used to do shadow plays in the evening in a seldom-used room next door. We would turn the light on and it would cast a great shadow on the wall in our bedroom and we would create shadow plays, and they were terrific fun.

At school we had regular productions, at primary school I played the mother of the little white bull, which I enjoyed very much, that was in grade 4. We used to have a thing called Amateur Night every year, where anyone could get up and perform anything they wanted and I remember in '74 or '75, we did a terrific movement piece from *Hair*, which was fantastic. We also raised a couple of thousand dollars for the Cancer Foundation, doing a show called *'Smazing*, and we called it *'Smazing* because an Italian fellow who was working with us, every time he saw one of us working and creating a piece, he'd say "Oh, that's mazing" and so I was surrounded by students and

teachers who appreciated – amongst other things – the drama outlet and the qualities of expression.

I left school in 1975 and came to Tasmania, and had a short stint as a student at a local college before I stuffed a knee up. In the term that I had at this school, our drama teacher paired me up with a girl called Lorraine West, and we did a piece for the Launceston competitions. We won our section, the duologue/trilogue section, and ego aside, we were a street in front of anybody else, mainly thanks to our teacher choosing the right piece for us. It was my first real introduction to William Shakespeare that I can remember, and it was marvellous. After that, there was a big break because I wasn't rebellious but I was certainly unsettled, and I worked for four or five years in Hobart, before I realised that all my mates were at university, I was as intelligent as they, and I went back to study.

I worked in the mines, to get money to go back through school. I went to matric¹ and there, when I returned to the classroom as a mature age student, I rediscovered language and I rediscovered literature, and I rediscovered drama. It was quite a watershed for me, being surrounded by enthusiastic teachers, by talented and motivated students, and in that year I had decided that I needed to, and wanted to, become a teacher. I wanted to share, I wanted to encourage, I wanted to enthuse young people about the English language, about expression, about celebrating the past, about embracing life through language. With a greater vocabulary, and the greater life experiences of going to plays and speaking with people, they could learn more about themselves.

So I went to the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education, as it was then, and I was involved in numerous theatre productions. Through this I had to battle a lot with one of the senior lecturers in Drama, who wanted me to be wholly and solely drama. I told him that in order to be a balanced drama teacher, I needed to enjoy experiences outside of the drama game. I understood his point because there weren't that many males in the drama

¹ College (Grades 11 & 12).

game, but I also needed to balance my life between the two. If I was *all* drama, then I wouldn't be able to bring any life experiences *to* drama. I was involved in sport, in the student union, in sailing boats back up from Hobart to Sydney, and I believe this was absolutely and totally important to becoming a well-balanced drama teacher. In saying this to him, I respected his opinions and he respected mine, which was important.

Another significant event was the first two years I had teaching at a private school, because in these two years I had to not only justify drama as a part of the curriculum, but also had to justify my teaching methodologies with another colleague, who had a completely different style and a different approach to drama. I remember each night, every day of the term, spending two to three hours writing detailed lesson plans; what I would do in the first five or ten or fifteen minutes, what I would do in the next five or ten or fifteen minutes, for every lesson. When I'd planned them, I would also be reviewing the lessons that I had taken: *Did I achieve my objectives, what was the time span like, was I flexible?* I assessed like a maniac and my analysis and statistics were fair up to this point, but they were sharpened at this school.

At this school I also had to justify a play which I had selected called *The Laundry Girls*, which involved unmarried mothers, and was about the landed gentry taking advantage of lower class citizens. The headmaster at the time, rang me at a quarter to nine one evening, and said, "Mr. Martin, there appears to be a problem with the play".

"What's the problem?" I said.

"Well it's the material that's a bit of a problem, as far as issues which are raised."

"Can I come out and see you?"

"It's a quarter past nine Mr. Martin."

"I'll be out in ten minutes."

A long story short was he said he would go along with me, but would reserve the right to pull it on full dress rehearsal if he thought it was inappropriate. He came to the full dress rehearsal, and left with moist eyes I'm touched to say. I was grateful for his patience and his testing of me, to make sure that

what I was doing had the right qualities for where I was working, for the people who I was working with, and for the audience for which it was intended.

After two years I left for what was to be three years teaching overseas, two years teaching in London, and a year in Tokyo. In my first year of teaching in London, which was my third year of my career, a couple of small but significant things occurred. One was that I started teaching at an all-girls' school, and I was team teaching with a woman who had just come back from stress leave, because a number of girls in a particular class had said that she had displayed lesbian activities. On the first day back in the classroom, a girl went into a room that contained props and costumes, and let out a little squeal. The female teacher with whom I was teaching went into the room to see what the problem was, out of line of sight of us all. There was this terrible, blood-curdling scream and the girl came out, with a smug and satisfied expression on her face. The teacher reappeared shortly thereafter looking ashen faced, because she had been set up, again, and the kids were taking her to the cleaners. I learned a significant lesson as a drama teacher and for teachers in general, that you just don't get yourself into a compromising situation, because it will only kick your professional teeth out. It was a fantastic learning experience just watching what had happened.

I could have stayed over there teaching for some time but I didn't. I went to Japan, where I taught mainly English for one year, and in doing so, learned that I understood the language a little bit more than the average teacher. After some time, I was being requested by business people, by housewives, as well as by school students to teach them on a one-to-one basis. When you put the two together, teaching and travelling, I was in a marvellous situation, of gaining valuable life experiences and enjoying life, and then in that happy frame of mind, going into the classroom, and being able to share them. My ability to embrace living was fantastic, because I was doing what I wanted to do on two counts. I was enjoying great life experiences, and then going into classrooms and saying enjoy life, and be able to relate it to people.

I went back to England and taught again, and apart from teaching in high schools, I would do weekend workshops at private schools. After one more year I came back to Australia, and taught at Hillview Special School for four years. Hillview at that stage was a school for students with expressive language difficulties amongst other things, and while I was working with language-based students, it was a different type of working with language. From there I got a posting to a 'normal' high school, at Esk High School, where I learnt the bitter realities of teaching, about the politics and the ladder climbing. I revisited teaching en-masse 25 students, who may or may not be interested in drama, and apart from teaching drama I was also teaching English and it was marvellous and refreshing to jump into the 'English-teaching' pool again. I kept away from the politics of teaching and the politics of teachers, and just focused on my teaching and I had a marvellous time.

2. The angle of difference

Only when the past ceases to trouble and anticipations of the future are not perturbing is a being wholly united with his environment and therefore fully alive. (Dewey, 1934/1980, p. 18)

What does it take, to live a meaningful life? For me, there have been times when my life is in danger of becoming simply a matter of mathematics, counting the minutes as they turn to hours, the hours as they become days, then weeks, then months, then years. I have felt like I am watching my life from the margins, part of an audience unable to direct an unfolding performance. Sometimes I wonder, will I look back on these times, and wonder what I could have been doing, what I should have achieved? Which of my experiences will I remember, and what have I done to keep my life meaningful? Who am I living for? What am I waiting for? And yet there are other times when I feel an overwhelming sense of unity – I am who I want to be, I am doing what I want to do. These are the times when I am not just following a plot, reciting someone else's script, but writing my own script, inventing myself as I want to be.

To live a meaningful life, I have found, I must create it, through my actions, my words, and my experiences. I must be an artist, using my life as the canvas for a self-portrait, using my experiences as the materials which mark and shape it. As with all art, I do not know when this project will finish, or what the result will be. My life is a process, a journey, and with each experience, like a stroke on the canvas, new possibilities are found and lost. Each stroke is creation and destruction, a mark of permanency that builds the foundations for new directions while limiting the possibilities that call from an empty space. And yet each stroke is also a call to observe the present – to reassess the ‘whole’ as it grows and changes, to simultaneously be viewer and creator. As Dewey (1934/1980) writes, “The artist embodies in himself the attitude of the perceiver while he works” (p. 48). It is my capacity as an artist, to observe and to act in the present, while also holding the past and future in mind, that allows me to shape my life, to see who I am as well as who I have been and want to be. I am trying to make my life an act of conscious creation, where experiences do not happen, but are worked, in reference and response to the marks already made, and the spaces of my canvas I am yet to fill.

But this is my journey, my work. What of the lives and works of others? What does it take, to live a meaningful life? And how do we share our lives, this journey, with others? Can such a thing be taught? If so, who should teach it, and who should learn?



I think one of the things which has come through the stories is that
I appear to look for adventure
and as much as it sounds old
and happy
and all that sort of stuff

In essence I actually think
it’s true –
I do look a lot for that angle
of difference.

I just look for avenues
because (if they’re not going to kill you)
I figure it’s okay
to push from time to time.

◆◆◆

John – 42 years old – seems restless.

◆◆◆

I want to tell you about an absolutely brilliant experience I had at school. One of the Brothers took a group of students, including myself, to see the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. It was at the Melbourne Town Hall, and I still remember where we were sitting – as you look at the stage, we were on the right hand side upstairs, on the edge.

It was absolutely fucking awesome, I still remember it. To go from saltshakers and pots and pans, to this musical five-course meal, this absolute poetry, was just brilliant.

When it finished, I thought: *This is terrible*. But what could I do? Were there social lines drawn, to stop kids in daggy Sacred Heart uniforms from standing up and peeping encore? Would the Brother have frowned upon it? I did nothing. I said nothing. We went home.

Later, I told my mother and father about it:

“I wanted to stand up and scream ‘Encore! Encore! Encore!’, but I didn’t.”

“Why didn’t you?” my mother replied.

“Well, I didn’t know that I could.”

◆◆◆

I do look at ways of making something more interesting from time to time. If I’m in this safe zone, I might look at an angle, and say “Okay, let’s do it.” It’s not for the sake of it necessarily, but sometimes it is just to explore.

◆◆◆

At school, John – 15 years old – is a clown. He has decided he will do the bare minimum to get through, and after that, he will put the handbrake on. He'll get out of the metaphorical car, and his mind will go wandering elsewhere. He has great fun at school, although whether this fun is entertaining or distracting probably depends upon which side of the teacher's desk you sit. His favourite game: he has a morning paper round, which gives him access to a limitless supply of rubber bands. Bags and bags of rubber bands. The French classroom becomes a regular battleground, everyone flicking and throwing these wobbly projectiles at each other (and occasionally even at the teacher).

He talks to his parents about this: "If I continue at this school, I just see myself slipping because I'm becoming more of a clown each year."

His parents agree.



Now, I just want to bounce on this Catholic thing. When you are brought up in a Catholic environment, one striking thing is the theatre and the ritual of going to mass. It's all rote, so much of it is just rote, but you're also a participant in this theatre. I was an altar boy, so I'd wear my costume of the surplice, and I'd go out there and bang the bell at the right time, and do the incense, and it's a pity you can't pick up the visual part on this tape. So I'd do the incense and the bells and say the right things and hold the plate underneath the person's mouth when they were having holy communion, and lift up the cassock of the priest when we had to walk out at the end if he had to wear the big one on a special day, and it's all colour and movement. It's all nothing more than theatre.

When I went back to Melbourne, I went to church with my parents, because there was a huge new organ at the church, and it was the oldest Catholic church in Australia. Big choir, lights, a seating arrangement for VIPs and

what have you, and the sense of pomp and pageantry of the whole gala performance for the opening of this new organ. It was something out of a religious theatre, it could only have been. And to extrapolate that back thirty years, it was much the same. For example, there were candles, and they had to be the right colour for the right religious season. I think that can't help but rub off on you. There's an old Latin saying that you are a part of all that you meet, and there's no way you can dismiss all that from your mind.



I'm old enough now to recognise that I will always continue to learn. I haven't grown up yet – not only in a childish sense, but also in the sense that youth is a state of mind.



At university, John is many things. He is a student, a sailor, a politician, an actor, a sportsman, a boarding house master. He has many stories to tell, many events to create and remember, in each of these capacities. There is another capacity that he takes on, one that is perhaps more familiar and more exciting. During his time at uni, John is a clown. More specifically, John is the Masked Avenger.

Tom Atkins, walking out of his house late one morning after a night watching the soccer on the box, suddenly stops, turns around. His door, which was green the night before and has always been green, is bright pink. The paint is still wet, tacky as he presses together the fingers (also bright pink) he used to push it shut. Stuck to the door is a little cardboard mask, like Zorro's, but without the elastic. He pulls it off the door, noticing the sharp green shadow underneath – like the stencils in black on a tool board. Shaking his head, he turns the mask over. The other side is a matte black, and a message is elegantly scrawled across it in gold lettering, glinting softly in the morning sun: THE MASKED AVENGER HAS STRUCK AND WILL STRIKE AGAIN. With the gold on black, the flowery writing, it looks more like an

invite to the ballet. Except for the fact that his door, his hands, and half of this soppy piece of cardboard, are now pink.

All told, the Masked Avenger struck, and continued to strike, for about a year (although it could have been a touch more or less). And it was a year in which things in Launceston were no longer, well, flat – a year where people were a little less like zombies, and a little more willing to talk to each other.

◆◆◆

A refreshing holiday, or a vigorous set of activities, helps you to come back refreshed, revitalised, and with a clean slate. I'll always come back with an idea, saying "I reckon we can do something with a big rock, or a kite, or whatever."

◆◆◆

I came up here and found that
(gee)
here were lots of people not doing too much

and I must articulate this to you –
I wasn't thinking –
I wasn't being as overt or as didactic as saying:
(I am going to create a more interesting environment in which to live)

but I knew that what I was doing
was going to have people chatting.

◆◆◆

John is fairly new to the teaching game. He stands in front of this class, full of comfortable students in their comfortable private school, and wonders if any of them know what it is to have *an* experience. He has a suspicion that they don't. A breeze, fresh and cold, makes itself known by shifting papers, shocking the warm air of the room for several seconds and then is gone, its visit just long enough to remind John of his plans for the weekend, rapidly approaching. He glances out of the window briefly, a connection to a world

outside the room, and decides to share his anticipation with the students. Some of them simply laugh, and John has expected this response. Coming from generally conservative backgrounds, most have not even considered this type of thing. The undercurrent is there: *Bushwalking is stupid. If you go, you're just an idiot, full stop.*

"But Mr. Martin, isn't it supposed to snow up there?" This from a student in the front row, who is squinting slightly at John, his forehead wrinkled.

"Yes, well we thought about putting it off, but decided we wanted to do it, and do it overnight, with the full moon."

"Why are you going at night? Isn't it irresponsible of you to go when there is a danger that you may end up lost? People will have to go in to look for you and people will worry about you and it's a waste of resources. You could prevent the problem in the first place if you just don't go." A good point.

"Well if we were to do it during the day, it becomes just another day walk which I may blend in with going to the Walls of Jerusalem or something up in the lakes, and that would be sad. But I can make my experience more memorable by doing it with a twist, by saying I did this walk but I did it at night, with different people that I haven't done it with before, and so that provides really chunky avenues for memory to remember, and besides which I haven't done an evening walk before and it should be fun. I don't do it for the sake of saying it will be memorable, I do it because it will be fun, and fun *is* good memories."

Little else is said on the subject. The student in the front row stops squinting, and crumples back into his chair. Most of the others are still silent. One boy, Richard, also sitting in the front row, is slowly nodding. Perhaps Richard understands that it is not enough to let things happen, to take experiences as they come. How then can you know when they will be significant? Better to create your own significance, to enrich the experiences you create, than trust that they will come along anyway.

The rest of the lesson, and the day, have much in common with those that have come before, and those that will follow. The walk in the snow with friends was perhaps more memorable. However, it is the experience in this classroom, and Richard's slow acknowledgement, that will call to John most vividly fifteen years later.

♦ ♦ ♦

I've learned that in the backyard of life itself, Tasmania is a bit of a gully trap. It's off the track, it's at the bottom of Australia, and it's in a bit of a cultural backwater. While it's a beautiful, peaceful, loving, happy, and harmonious place to live, it's also terribly... still, and I can't stay still. I'm looking to say let's travel and move overseas, and then come back and appreciate the fact that we can slow down in our lovely backwater.

♦ ♦ ♦

It was time to move on,
 time to come home.
Having said that
 (and being a thinker)
I looked at
 where is home?
 (so travel provided me with all these life tests and life jumps)

I thought
 where is home?
Is home where you're comfortable in your job?
Where you know people?
Where there's plenty of adventure?
Is home where the heart is?
 (that old cliché)
Is home where your family is?
Is home in your body?

I don't know that I've got a complete answer

But I ended up coming back to the places I know best
I arrived back here in Launceston.

♦ ♦ ♦

I think from my wife's perspective, I'm probably a pretty testing person to be around at the moment, because every day I'm talking about avenues I'm trying to create as far as going overseas is concerned. I'm looking above and beyond our house, while Sarah is saying "Why don't we draw \$5000 against our house and do up the driveway?" and talking about Christmas things, which are all very important from the family basis.



John appears to remember many of his students, for many things. He remembers Richard, for example, for his silent understanding, his drive to enrich his experiences of school. Perhaps most vividly though, he remembers his negotiations and discussions of several years ago, with a promising, positive student named Natalie Owen. Natalie was a success, in drama, in debating, and across the school. More than this, she knew she was successful, and she had become driven, and aggressive, in her pursuit of challenges. She knew that she wanted to be in the drama and theatre game, and would demand more and more from John, in terms of food for thought, and mental exercise. He would provide these challenges, either in the drama forum, or the debating forum. More often than not, she would accept.

There was one time, however, when she didn't accept the challenge. In a grade 10 drama class, John had decided to explore a Brechtian approach to performance. The other students had accepted, but Natalie, who would normally embrace this sort of challenge to move beyond what she knew, was not participating. It seemed the other students had accepted the risk, acknowledging that through this work, by stepping outside of what had become comfortable, they may learn more about themselves. John had always felt that the core of drama was communication, and that this communicative act was by its very nature a dangerous one. Life is made up of experiences, and he felt a responsibility to offer his students new avenues through which these experiences, and thus their lives, could be explored and understood. In communicating about their lives, the students would essentially be unfolding a

part of who they were, offering this up for the judgement and analysis of their peers and him. And indeed, this was risky for the students, as is any drama experience. However, it was not risk-taking for the sake of risk-taking; rather it was to enable the students to come to terms with the world and their place in it. On this occasion, Natalie stood back, folded her arms, and refused to take that risk. John, aware of her desire to work in the performing arts, had thought at the time: *Dear oh dear, you need to be taking these risks here in grade 10, because it will never be this safe again.*

Natalie is now in Melbourne, auditioning for parts in *Neighbours*, or shampoo advertisements, or whatever. And John is sure that she is now learning one very small lesson – that perhaps she should have listened to Mr. Martin a little bit more in the past. Perhaps she could have taken the opportunities he offered for personal as well as academic challenges, invested a little more, risked a little more and gained a little more. From that small seed, John hopes, she may learn to listen to the *other* people who can provide her with a better foundation for understanding not only her career, but who she is in the world.



So much of life is all just about storytelling. If students have an experience, whether it be a good one or a bad one, it's part of our make up that we need to share that. Psychologists do it with young people by asking them to draw rather than use language, and I think the guidance officer occasionally uses it here at school when she asks students to pick a face if they can't say how they feel. So I'm working from that idea – that through life as we experience things, we share them. My role as a drama teacher is to offer them different avenues to express this.

It's fantastic to hear grade 10s, when I sit down with them in the first few lessons and say: "Tell us about yourself. Tell us about your background. What makes you tick?" All of a sudden, there's two or three links with students that they've been with for three years, and they're only finding out

now that we're sitting down expanding on these experiences. I was pleasantly surprised, when I employed these types of questions, to see that it created links – some would last and be long term, some would be short term, but they were there.

♦ ♦ ♦

I live in a nice house, with two beautiful children, and a lovely wife, a patient wife. And now I want to go overseas, I want to get some more experiences happening here. Now I want to leave.

♦ ♦ ♦

I'm getting better at what I do
but I still find myself frustrated as a teacher because
I probably set the bar too high for myself.

It was certainly a problem that I had at Hillview
and I was told so.
they said:

Marty
you've just got to start enjoying the great successes that you are
getting
rather than saying there's still more.

I probably should do that here too,
but instead I hound students
to keep pursuing the attainment of better things.

(God
this is the good part –
I can hear John Martin coming through from practices of my own life
here)

in that I say to the students:

Just keep looking for another standard that you can meet
and by exploring this
you'll find out more about yourself.

♦ ♦ ♦

John – 42 years old – seems restless.

3. **Standing up, standing out**

It's okay to make a mistake
because it says that you have been trying to do something
and gee –

I reckon Galileo made mistakes
or Sophocles made mistakes

(and I'm not using this as an excuse to say
I make lots of mistakes so please forgive me)

But I'm one of them –
I do make mistakes
and I admit them
which really surprises people sometimes.

♦ ♦ ♦

I certainly see myself as being different, sometimes for the sake of it, or to
explore a new type of thing. Sometimes I'll stand high and sometimes I'll
stand low, and recently in this school I've probably been standing medium.

♦ ♦ ♦

I found Hillview more challenging than I had found other schools, and I don't
really know why. I think on reflection, it's because of the ineptness of the
principal of the school, and how it permeated right down through the ranks. I
say that with no disrespect to the lady who was a lovely lady, but she had been
appointed principal through the old system, where you can become principal
just by being in the system for so long. She had no idea, and as such we got
no support and no Professional Development. There was no leadership, so
that when Tom Bishop arrived, first year out teacher, and didn't know what to
expect here, I was able to give a guy's point of view. I had been the only guy
there in the one year before he arrived, and I was having all sorts of trouble
because a lot of these kids didn't have fathers.

Whenever there were any problems where they needed to discipline a student, they'd say: "Oh, I'll go and get Mr Martin", so I was perceived as this thug, this ogre, the enforcement. That's not my role, and I didn't want it, I didn't seek it. It was indirectly and inappropriately thrust upon me because of the composition of the staff – because the principal hadn't looked at the gender balance, and equity and all that sort of thing.

But when Tom came, we were able to really invigorate the school, along with the other staff, and so we actually led the school from the ground up. We ended up raising, in one year, enough money to build a tennis court from start to finish, so we are looking at something between 10 and 20 thousand bucks. At the end of the year, we found out that we had enough money in the coffers that hadn't been spent that we could've sat on our arses and not raised a single cent and still had this tennis court. The students could do Physical Education on it, they could do maths challenges and they could do other sports on it during wet times and oh, so it was enjoyable. It became easier.

Then Tom left, and I was again under the pressure of being the only guy, which I didn't want, and besides which, as much as I enjoyed the teaching part, if you want to get passionate about something or other, I don't know that you can get passionate about teaching in such a clumsy environment for four years.

◆◆◆

It's a really funny thing that happens with John Martin
and I think it's part of the hangover
of being a boy
or being a man
where you just
do it
and get on with it.

I'm not one to take much credit.

◆◆◆

I'll be very honest here. For the sake of the tape recorder, I've now got my forehead in my left hand. I arrived at Esk High School in '95, having never taught in an Education Department high school before, and I was in for many surprises. I arrived; I was given a timetable, and was expected to learn by osmosis and to learn on the run. I did learn and it was great, because I arrived at a new school full of energy, enthusiasm, and ideas, and I was ready for a high school, having previously worked in a special education school.

I learned a lot about the jungle, and the politics of it all in that first year. I found that I was very low in the food chain, and I was being eaten, because I wasn't an ally to any particular department. I also made mistakes, and I didn't follow protocols that should have been followed, because the osmosis process hadn't worked accordingly, or because I had been naïve, or because people had assumed that because I was a teacher I should have known these practices. Sometimes they were practices that were peculiar to Esk High School; sometimes they were practices that I wasn't aware of, because I had been in a special school for five years.

The second year, I was much wiser.

♦ ♦ ♦

I was asked to work on the Rock Eisteddfod
and long story short,
was that the principal called me
and told me that there had been
a complaint
made
by a couple of girls
(a number of girls)
saying
that Mr. Martin
was taking too much footage of the girls.

I was absolutely dumbstruck
I was gob smacked
I was absolutely beside myself
this was shattering
on a major scale.

I don't relate the story very often
and believe you me
I knew it
in my heart of hearts
I *knew*-
I knew I'd done nothing wrong.

I wasn't able to confirm it until about three years ago.
So I went for a couple of years after that
just in the wilderness
because the principal hadn't even bothered
to have a look at the video
which I found gob smacking.

I would have thought that
gee
if I'd have been a principal
and this sort of stuff had come up
I would've interrogated everyone.

You know this is-
this is black sort of shit at a high school
and no one needs it.

The full circle
came into being
and rolled away
when I just had it confirmed one day
in a discussion.

I found that the complaint hadn't been made
by any students at all,
it had been made by a teacher
who was associated with the Rock Eisteddfod.

Unfortunately I was becoming a popular member
of the entourage
and this was a way of putting me in my place.

How
about
that?

So
that was my first year.

♦ ♦ ♦

There are so many teachers here who do good things, but they're not celebrated anywhere. I don't think that the current principal is aware that he's not doing that, because he's a very busy man, in helping to do the staffing for next year, and trying to create a transition for the new principal, as well as get ready for an extraordinarily big job at his next school. It still doesn't take away from the fact that whether it is student achievement, staff achievement, parent achievement, or whatever, we don't celebrate enough.



John stops in at his office looking to grab a bite and some papers, a quick break between lessons. What he finds is something quite different. In the space of ninety minutes of drama, his office appears to have been ransacked. Papers are scattered across the floor, books lie spreadeagled, their backs broken by the fall from the bookshelf. Or at least, the presumed fall – for the bookcase is no longer there to verify the incident. In its place lies this pile of his stuff – his plans, his resources – with the dust still settling.

He brings this up later in the day during the general staff meeting: "I knew I would be moving office. I knew my shelves were going to be used in another place. In future though, perhaps I could be part of this process, or at least be told that this is what's going to be happening, and asked when the best time to do it was. Let's learn from this mistake so that it doesn't happen again." A few people turn to him, the look on their faces: *surprise*. John realises he has accidentally opened up a little nutshell. The office moves have not been made public yet.

Another colleague, who has been nodding as John speaks, pipes up: "What about the process? What can we do about it?" He is really getting on the drum. John is aware that this man is also affected by the move.

All eyes now on him, John hesitates before responding. It's the last meeting, the last day of the school year. Is it very cost effective, he wonders, to muddy

the waters now, only to let them go still again over the seven-week holiday? Then, he replies: "I think all we can do about it now, is to learn from our mistakes, and move on."

The meeting does go on, limping at first perhaps, but soon regaining its equilibrium. But John feels the foolish thing about the whole situation is that those who really made the mistake have not spoken. John's concern was never that a mistake had been made. Yes, his books and papers were thrown about carelessly as part of the process, but he had to move anyway. If acknowledged, making mistakes can be one of the most powerful learning tools available, but if not? John knows that it's too easy for those involved to continue to blunder forward, as they have done for some time, with no rear-vision mirror to see the tattered remains they've left behind. This, he thinks, is the terrible thing.

♦♦♦

It sounds like I make lots of mistakes, but I'd say for every ten decisions I make, one will be wrong, and when I say wrong, it might just be minor, and in every hundred there might be one major, and I regard that as good. Other people don't think that's a good thing at all. It might be because they're older and have built up a resilience to change, or it might be because I'm taller, or I'm male, or they're having a bad time at the moment, or because they just can't cope. I'm not sure.

♦♦♦

I regard myself as always learning
and I'm trying to engender this with other members of staff.

I'm saying at 41
I'm a drama coordinator
and a grade coordinator
and doing these extracurricular things
(like talent nights, drama nights).

I'm trying to encourage a more compassionate environment
for people who are having a go

and they all think
that when you do something wrong
you just get punished for it
and end of story.

I think that's a pity.

◆◆◆

This was my fourth year as grade coordinator, with a lot of joys. Unfortunately, for all of it, I probably have more bad memories than good memories, which is sad, and something that I won't bother mentioning at the Leavers' Dinner² coming up in about three weeks. There are people who damage your car or call home and abuse your wife, or who are unfortunate enough to come from a poor family or from disinterested parents, or a place of domestic violence. When it's all said and done, when you're trying to move a community forward in a positive way and there's someone over there who's constantly damaging you through vandalism or physical violence or emotional abuse, then that's what sticks. They've been sticking more and more.

It's been a very interesting process that I've come to at the end of being a grade coordinator. It's been very sad in a way, because there's been no closure to it, insofar as, I got a brief thank you from an assistant principal, and when they did the grade 10 review they forgot to invite Mr Martin. I can respect the fact that people make mistakes, but there are some when you think: *Dear oh dear oh dear*. It wasn't that I was after the kudos; it could have been a quiet little thank you or a card, or at least some sort of acknowledgement. I volunteered for the job, did it as well as I could, and at the end... there was no end.

◆◆◆

**It fascinates me
why people aren't more forgiving.**

² A formal graduation dinner, usually held for Grade 10 students leaving high school, and Grade 12 students leaving college.

People are taking less
and less
and less
risks.

People have got to be able to accept change.

◆◆◆

I think in reference to what I said earlier
about wanting to be in an environment where you thank people
or where you can be accommodating for people who make mistakes
or just appreciate the fact that they are there
and where people are doing things
whether they work or whether they don't –

(Gee whiz)

I couldn't describe a drama classroom better than to say
it's better to try and have a go,
and to workshop ideas if they don't work,
than to sit on your hands and do nothing.

If we do nothing we let not just the drama classroom
but also the school deteriorate
and so we draw an analogy between drama and the school as a whole
that is equal and appropriate.

◆◆◆

John – 42 years old – seems restless. Not quite lost perhaps, but not quite sure
where to go from here.

4. Finding a balance

From the narrative point of view, identities have histories. They are narrative constructions that take shape as life unfolds and that may, as narrative constructions are wont to do, solidify into a fixed entity, an unchanging narrative construction, or they may continue to grow and change. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 94-5)

How is who I am as a teacher related to who I am more broadly? How does my teacher self confirm, trouble, or alter my sense of my self (or selves) in other places, other contexts?

I began to ask myself these questions during my third and fourth year teaching practicums as an undergraduate student – my first major experiences on the other side of the desk. During these periods of time, I remember frequently feeling reluctant to visit my friends, or people who knew me outside of the teaching context. During the week, I would spend my nights planning, or reflecting on the day's teaching. I think this behaviour was driven by a tension: a feeling that I wasn't quite there yet, the 'teacher' concept didn't quite seem to apply to me yet. I was grasping at something just beyond my reach. If I rejoined those contexts where I wasn't expected to be or act as a teacher, perhaps this teacher identity would just disappear from my reach altogether. Instead, if I could just focus hard enough, just look with enough intensity, then perhaps my fingers would finally lock around that elusive idea, and I would be built as a teacher. I realise now, that this was an unachievable goal – that the foundations of who I would become as a teacher didn't lie just out of reach, waiting to be discovered and then 'applied'.

And yet, if I am to believe (which I do) that who I am is fragmented, multiple, and temporal, how is it that I don't become consumed by how I see myself as a teacher? How do I maintain a sense of 'being' in a broader sense? I know that who I am in teaching contexts, the selves I play out there to myself and others, must draw upon, or be influenced by, something larger. However, I felt for some time that this must be a one-way process. After all, how could the 'smaller' concept of me as teacher influence my 'larger' construction of self? And yet, how is this something larger built, if not upon the foundations laid down by my actions and experiences? Given that in recent years, many of these actions and experiences have been carried out in my role as a teacher, how can who I am as a person not be altered by who I am as a teacher?

But again, this is my life, my concern. What of the lives of others? Is this an issue that resolves itself through time? Is this concern even shared? How do others find that balance, between being a teacher and just "being"? Do they even need to try?

♦ ♦ ♦

I have a family-

(when I say family, a wife and two children)

and it's marvellous,
and they are sets of experiences,
which help me with my patience
with high school children.

It's helped me appreciate where the students are coming from
and where I'm heading
so that I'm learning as much from the students who are sitting there.
I'm just watching them and saying:
what am I up against in years to come?

So,
the monitor's going well in advance,
and the kids don't know that I've got that
vacuum cleaner on
to put it all in the memory bag.

♦ ♦ ♦

I've seen teachers whose lives are totally marinated by their schools, and who
have jumped in by their own volition. They sometimes have a very twisted
way of running things and organising things, and are very egocentric and it's
sad. They don't have families, and they spend an inordinate and unhealthy
amount of time on things related to school, so much so that they don't know
what's happening in the outside world because to them, the world is the
school. I pity their situation.

♦ ♦ ♦

What do I think of my part in this school? Sometimes I think I've been a bit
of a sucker. Every day I go into the main staffroom and I see teachers there
and they're sitting down, and when the bell goes, they'll finish their cup of
tea, and they'll get their stuff together, and they'll arrive late for their class

teacher³ group. They go about their business and at 3.30 when the bell goes, or when it's time that teachers can legitimately leave the school, they leave the school. Why? Because that is all that's required of them, no more no less, and they're paid exactly the same amount as John Martin. And yet I volunteered to be the drama coordinator, which you get two periods a week compensation for, but it doesn't come anywhere near compensating for the demand on your time, and you get six lessons a week for being grade coordinator, and I applied for it because I thought that would be a responsible thing. Six lessons a week doesn't come near what work is required for that, and I'm thinking: *Maybe I could just be going home.*

Now it's not in the way I was brought up, and that's been covered in earlier interviews, and that's not my nature, so I find for myself, that I'm a sucker. Being who I am, and being a giving sort of person, is rather sad at times. You think: *Oh, why do I have to give all the time?*, when you're tired and you'd much rather just relax.



So two years ago, I was a drama coordinator, a grade coordinator, and a debating coordinator, which meant that for my family time, oh it was just less and less and less. Also two years ago I was running a business, which is as you know another story. Something had to give, and it had to be the outside world.



While I'm busy
I'm very happy.

My father as an example
has just been diagnosed with cancer
(*not a good scene at all*).

³ Also known as 'home group', or 'home room'. Most Tasmanian high schools and colleges operate a similar system, whereby students spend a period of time each day in class groups, with one teacher. This period of time is allocated for administrative and pastoral care purposes, separate from subject class time

I found out yesterday.

So I was speaking to one of my brothers
who's in New South Wales –
we speak to one another on all sorts of light-hearted issues
but also in the problem of travelling from Sydney to Melbourne
or from Launceston to Melbourne.

I said:

*If I go there I don't want to be sitting around
doing nothing.
I want to do something.
I want to produce something.*

I don't want to produce emotion necessarily,
I'd much rather go over
and say:

*Can I do something to help my dad:
By cleaning the gutters in the roof?
By fixing the watering system?
By cleaning the windows?
By doing something that's going to keep me doing something in a
positive way?*

So disregarding the environment
I like to keep busy,
I'm busy at school,
I'm busy at home
and I do complain about it,
but I think that it's a good thing to be.

◆◆◆

Tim: *The next one I've got here is balance, between living your life as a teacher and living your life as someone who has experiences outside of teaching. Being able to manage the two together seems to me, to be something that is very important in terms of how you see yourself as a teacher...*

John: Yes it is, and people manage it in all sorts of different ways. I would say that currently I am probably out of balance, in that I'm probably doing more for school, than I am at home. The more that I'm doing for

school doesn't allow me to go out kayaking, which I like to do, or go away with the family. I haven't been out with my wife for three months, yet she's been to Adelaide for a week and I've just come back from Melbourne, so we're not doing things together as much as we would like. There are other teachers, who I'm noticing balance their life very well by saying: "I'm quite happy with doing the minimum amount of work and spending a lot of time doing my fishing and looking after my children, or just doing things away from the school."

For me it's desperately important to maintain that outside thing, and dare I say, if we wanted to have a theme, a through line for this tape, would be that. So I work to create that balance, and not only just create a balance between time, it's saying: "I want to be as energetic at pursuing what is out there, as I am about pursuing excellence or personal levels here", because we don't all achieve to the same level. I suppose what I'm saying is that the word for both of them is energy, saying in the classroom let's work energetically towards achieving our objectives and the best we can do there, outside, let's go energetically too... so if you've got four tickets to Saudi Arabia so I can go teaching in the Middle East, I'll be going there tomorrow and I'll do something on the way, there you go... yes, you're right.

5. Conclusion

There are some things
John knows:

it's attitude
it's training
it's origin
it's energy
it's balance
it's experience.

He has sharpened his life
(like a pencil)
to a point on these words⁴

⁴ I have borrowed and extended this image from a poem by Andrew Peek.

and
drawn his course
with a line.

but now:
has
the
point
become
dull?

John
42 years old
seems:

(restless
unsettled
too comfortable)

not quite lost.

Not quite sure
where he has found himself
or where to go from here
but at least
there are plenty of
choices.

6.

Anna White

Having a process of reflection and review is so important. If you don't have a process of reflection, you're never able to say to yourself "I'm doing okay here", because all you're doing is stumbling from one experience to the next.
(Anna, Interview 2, p. 11)

1. Introduction

In the first interview, Anna began her story with an experience that was both positive and negative. This is what she said:

My experiences tend to fall into very positive or very negative experiences. The outcomes, though, have all been positive. I think that has just been part of evolving as a practitioner, because I've found that without being strong, you just don't survive, especially in the performing arts. What I've found about the negative experiences is that they've taught me not to worry about the knocks, but to keep going, because your belief in what you're doing has to be that strong that it overcomes other people's disbelief or lack of faith, whatever the case may be.

I've always been into performance of one sort or another, from a very young age. I've always had a belief in the joy that performance can bring, and that's what I feel as a teacher, and that's what I want my students to experience. In a way, I suppose I see that joy, that fun, of participating in drama and dance, as so important that I have to shape experiences that the students can enjoy. I also have to shape situations so that they're protected from the cynicism, or the negativity, or whatever else is brought to bear in the usual school situation, with timetables and budgets and literacy and numeracy quotas, and all the rest of it.

The very first experience that actually shaped me as a drama practitioner would have been when I was working in a Theatre in Education team, in another state. This was just after I finished secondary school, when I was one of those ‘floating’ people – I didn’t know what I was going to do. I’d actually done some work experience scenarios with teaching and really enjoyed them, to the point where I’d go and speak to my grade 9 teacher and say to him: “Can I teach one of your younger classes?” It was pretty freaky, and he was pretty freaked, but that was the kind of person that I feel I’ve always been – if I saw an opportunity, I would trial it first, before committing myself to it. So with this Theatre in Education team, it was just luck. One of my old teachers was the director of the team, and he rang me up, and asked if I wanted a job. I said: “Thanks, that will be fun.” So I went up to join the team, and I worked there for twelve months.

That was where I saw the other side of how students interact with the arts, and how they are shaped by them. I found that a lot of the time, it was almost like a sponge – they sat there and they absorbed. But what would really determine what the final experience was for each individual child, was how much each teacher followed up, or had prepared them beforehand. That made me realise just how powerful you are as a teacher, in terms of determining individual experience. That’s when I realised that it’s a really scary thing, to have that kind of power, because so many people abuse it.

I worked with that team for twelve months, and it was fun, but it was also really hard. I learned about egos, and all that sort of thing. The kids were delightful, it was the other actors that were a challenge. It saddened me that a lot of the joy of the performance, which was what I’d always experienced and relished, was actually killed off by these adults. I thought at the time: *I don’t think I want to work with adults*. So I came back here, and was accepted into the drama education course.

2. Outside

Teachers and classrooms are so intricately linked in the professional literature that it is easy to forget that teachers spend many hours each week outside of the classroom with people other than students. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 5)



At her first school,
(Grey Mountain District High)
Anna learned:
what she wanted and why.

At her second school,
(Milton High)
Anna learned:
*about having her eyes open.
what it meant to be vulnerable.*

At her third school,
(Eastbridge High)
Anna learned:
*how to prioritise.
that brilliance has its downside.
that the possibilities were —*

At her fourth school,
(Frankland High)
Anna learned:
*the language of diplomacy.
methods to successfully jump
over hurdles
and through hoops.
about moving the goalposts.
the ropes.*

Like fingerprints, these
lines
curl and intersect
become her marks.

These
lines
mark her
make her.

◆◆◆

1

My enjoyment of teaching, and the satisfaction I gained from it, was such that I didn't want to sacrifice it. I didn't want to compromise to make other people feel comfortable.

◆◆◆

If you have a principal who is very arts focused, then life is easy. If you haven't, and you have to validate and justify virtually every step you take, then life is extremely difficult. These people are promoted for whatever reason, because they meet whatever criteria, and they are given such incredible power. If you just stay in your classroom and do your teaching program, then they will have a certain amount of impact on you. But if you want to innovate, or bring about change, or raise the profile of the students: well it's either going to be made really easy or really difficult, and the person who will do that is your principal.

◆◆◆

I was very
accepting
of authority
and the establishment,

and so
that's how I entered
schools.

So at Milton High,
when
they
said:

*Grade 8s are no longer
going to be having
compulsory drama, instead*

*they can choose it
for
one
term*

I went:

*Okay
then.*

◆◆◆

My first big negative came at Milton High. The school had a very traditional focus there, and had done for a long time. They had taken away and taken away and taken away, until I was the only teacher of drama. We had a music teacher that took one grade 8 class for a while, and I just taught all drama. The students really wanted to do some kind of production, and I wanted to as well, but I was thinking: *How can we do this?*, because there was myself and a music teacher, and nobody else ready to come on board, just because of the nature of the staffing and the way it had been channelled over time.

We decided to have a production anyway, and so I wrote a script collaboratively with a student. We wrote it so that one character travelled along a journey, and each drama class could be responsible for three scenes, with only one scene where everyone performed together, because that way it would be very easy to put together and we could rehearse after school, and on weekends, and that sort of thing. The production was to basically do with all the issues that students face, so it ranged from things like image and self-esteem, right through to sex education. We had dancing condoms and all that stuff which was really cool, and it was all – we thought – very tasteful.

The principal came to see me one day, and said that he wanted to talk about how we were going to have people view the show. I said: “Well I would like the grade 8s, 9s and 10s to see it, but I’m not sure about the grade 7s, because they haven’t done sex education yet.” Being the conservative type of man that he was, and suddenly finding out that the show had sex education in it, the principal freaked out. Then he wanted to read the script. I said to him: “Well

it doesn't really show you anything, because it's bald, as scripts are." So then he decided that rather than read it, he would get the management team to come and sit in judgement on a rehearsal.

When I heard this, I decided I would ask the Parents and Friends committee to send representatives to this same rehearsal, because a lot of the parents of course had children in the performance. Quite a few of them were too scared, or felt that attending would place their positions on the P & F in jeopardy, because that was the nature of the management team at the school, and so they said they would come to the rehearsal the night before the management team. They came, and they just stood and applauded at the end. There were about half a dozen people there, and they all said it was just fantastic. They thought that their grade 6 children should see it. After all of this, I was quite confident. They had talked about how it was a learning experience, but it was presented in a fun way and had a positive ending and so on.

The next night, the management team arrived to rehearsal. Eight students didn't show up. They actually came to see me the next day to apologise, because they were too scared to perform. The remaining students of course gave a half-hearted performance, and then we had to sit and wait for the management team to have a discussion and make their decision. They decided that the production wasn't entirely appropriate, therefore we weren't allowed to present to other schools – even though by this stage eight other schools had already booked. We could, perhaps, show it once, to the grade 9 and 10 students at Milton.

When I finished crying, after all those months of work, I was incredibly angry. To think that the students, myself, the P & F representatives, all of us, our opinions meant nothing. To think that these people had such power, that they could just make a decision like that. With the students' backing, we cancelled the show. We said: "If we can't perform the show as is, and we can't perform it to an audience as we wish, then we're not doing it at all." It was a really huge learning curve for me. I've never really recovered from it.

Professionally, it's one of those things that are a little soul-destroying. I left that school soon after.



Education shouldn't be about it being too hard. It should be about what you can do, and about doing it well.



After being at my next school – Eastbridge High – for a few years, it was time to move on again. I went to Frankland High. In doing so, I went from the very supportive, very engaging environment at Eastbridge, where there was all the recognition in the world for anything that you did, to the absolute opposite. Again it was a situation of great staff, really strong, fun, and positive, and beautiful kids, but also a couple of people in management creating a really dynamite situation. It simmered away and simmered away. This was an environment where your efforts were firstly scrutinised for what was wrong with them, and any initiative was scrutinised for what problems it might create. It was very difficult to make anything happen. I tended to develop these almost devious strategies of how to achieve things, which I found very time consuming and also very draining – emotionally, mentally, and physically.

For example, if I wanted something, I'd think: *Why will they want to fight this...* So first off I learned that you had to identify what they'd actually *not* want – why they wouldn't want it to happen, how they would argue against it, and what points they would bring up as being detrimental to the cause. So I'd do all that, and put it in a written proposal, and then I'd go to the principal and I'd say: "I've committed this to paper as you suggested, because we discussed this last week. Now I think I've addressed everything that you suggested I should, so if you can just look over it, and just tell me if there's anything else you'd like me to modify, but I think I've done exactly what you said." This was basically lying, but it came down to the fact that it was the only way I

could win. Because they were so busy, and because this particular principal at Frankland High was always trying to do so much, and wouldn't delegate, it was easy to do that. I had to learn to jump through all sorts of hoops and then be prepared to start all over again.



Eventually at Frankland High, the people who were strong moved on, and were replaced by people who were more accepting. The whole culture of the place changed to the point where I just thought: *I'm one of the few voices here that is prepared to disagree*. It's really difficult for me to go down that path, without being totally indiscreet, but basically the needs, interests, and values of the students, the staff, and the school community, were not paramount for the principal there.

It's really awful to think that there are people out there that still place themselves in such autocratic positions, and yet here we are, especially in the arts, trying to establish a sense of community. And because we are, we are so much more affected by a supportive or non-supportive principal. I think all the other areas can pretty much get on. I know that all of the learning areas had problems communicating with this principal, but they could manoeuvre themselves around the goalposts as it were, as they continually shifted every day. Every time it happened though, I was shocked anew. I thought: *Get out while it still shocks you*.



The people that have
the power
are bullies
a lot of the time.

and they bluff you.

they say: *There's no money*
or: *We need this*

so now

I pull out
the occupational health and safety guidelines
and I say

*We need to have extractor fans,
because it says so here in clause 7.1*

and they go,
*Oh,
it's an official document.*

I've recognised
that it's not enough
to just go in and say
*this
should
happen.*

You have to be
prepared-
you have to
think ahead to
what the person might argue against you,

so you say:

*Well, yes
I recognise your point of view*

(which you must do because if
you don't you're just going to be applying
the same bullying tactics that they are).

Yes,
if you can look ahead
and see
then you're prepared
and in
preparation
you have
strength.

◆◆◆

*Agency is the quality of an individual that makes doing possible; it
means believing that one's self is capable of action... developing*

agency is akin to cultivating a form of will. (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 163)

♦ ♦ ♦

2.

As a person who has been a victim of authority abused, I know that I wouldn't do that.

♦ ♦ ♦

When I have been in a management position, as in taking a leadership role or coordinating a department, I've been really careful to protect the rights of the people who work with me. At Frankland High, I had a young girl working with me who I thought was a brilliant operator. She did have the odd area of weakness, but hey, we all have, and how will we ever strengthen those without guidance and support? However, the principal, upon the word of another teacher, decided that my colleague was illiterate, and therefore should not be employed by the school again. As she was only temporary, this could actually happen. I went in fighting, to no avail. At least I felt like the girl walked away from that school, knowing that someone believed in her a hundred percent.

♦ ♦ ♦

Eastbridge High School. It was a fantastic place to teach, in so many ways, but I had a really major experience here. Before this, I'd had that really negative experience dealing with management at Milton High, but at Eastbridge, I had a really negative experience dealing with a colleague.

I taught there with this woman who was a brilliant teacher. She had a fantastic personality, really good fun, and we socialised a lot together. Unfortunately, for lots of reasons, which there's no need to delve into, she

rode an emotional roller coaster, and because I worked with her and we shared an office, I rode the emotional roller coaster with her. One day she would be nurturing and supportive and caring with her students, and the next day she would be swearing disgustingly at them. We used to team teach, but with that sort of thing going on, it just became too difficult for that to happen. The students of course were very much aware of what was going on, so they would come to me, and it was all just a really awkward situation, and became progressively more so.

My experience is that drama teachers generally are either really emotionally strong, or they're emotionally very weak, and one way or the other, they're either brilliant to work with, or it is hideous. That to me was another learning thing – that you have to try to disassociate yourself from the personal, because it's too easy to be affected.

I just found it so difficult, to be in a room, where someone was swearing 'up hill and down dale' at the students, and I was standing there thinking: *Do I intervene? How do I handle this situation?* In the end I actually went to the assistant principal and asked for intervention, and asked for counselling for both of us, to try and resolve the situation. The resolution was basically that we needed to be moved apart. It was one of those things, where you hear that a professional is doing the wrong thing. Some people just turn a blind eye. Unfortunately, I'm one of those people who find it really hard to turn a blind eye.

That was another learning curve, and it basically meant that I just had to get on with it. It's that belief in yourself – you have to say: *I can't take responsibility for someone else's behaviour. I can't fix it. I can't change it.* I was really supportive of her for over eighteen months, and in the end it just got too hard, and for my own emotional health, I had to withdraw.

♦ ♦ ♦

I think it's a sad thing, but there are a lot of teachers out there that enjoy the authority and the power that comes with teaching, and they enjoy wielding it. I'm constantly reflecting upon the influence that I have. The students are at an incredibly impressionable age, especially once they hit high school, and if they are impressed by you for whatever reason, whether you're a great sportsman or you tell funny stories or whatever, they will immediately put you on a pedestal. They will accept and be receptive to whatever you do and say. We do have an incredible amount of power.

I said to a student the other day: "When are you going to realise that Teacher X has more power to make your life unpleasant here than you have to make hers? She goes home, and has a glass of wine, and thinks: *What a little sod*. You spend the next two days in the quiet room. Who's worse off here?"

That's the reality, so I try to make the kids face up to it. I might not support what the teacher did, or how they treated the students, but the reality is they've got the power. The quicker the students recognise that's the case, and how to play the games to gain what they need most, I think the better it is. I think it's really sad that they have to do that, but that's life. That's the reality of it, and as long as they're encountering people that do respect them, then hopefully they'll recognise that's what we strive for, and that's the fair and the right way to go. Hopefully by modelling that, the students that will pick up on it and run with that idea.

♦♦♦

The reality is that there are authority figures and systems out there that have power, and you have to learn to deal with them.

♦♦♦

What I've come to recognise
over time
is that you don't have to
set yourself up

in a role of
 leadership
to be a leader.

You don't have to
bandwagon
your theories
or beliefs.

I am professional
at all times
and I have a high
degree of integrity,
and a high
ethical stance,
and I think
people
respect
that.

I suppose I say
to myself now,
that I can be
proud of that
aspect of my
practice,
and of
myself.

♦ ♦ ♦

3.

Too often people play such political games that they sacrifice their own values and morals, and I don't believe I've ever done that. Sometimes I take the harder road, but at the end of it I believe my self-worth is greater than if I'd taken the easier one.

♦ ♦ ♦

I've worked in environments where I am continually trying to justify my process and my practice, through the development of a product, and the showcasing of that product. It becomes a case of: "See, I am doing the right

thing. Kids do like it. This is why we need the funding.” It’s all that sort of thing that arts teachers have to do so often.

Maybe because of that, I think a lot of people see the arts, especially drama, music, and visual art, as: “Oh, you’re lucky – you’ve got the opportunity to showcase yourselves.” But there’s an inbuilt pressure with that – to come up with the goods. Sometimes the process gets overlooked in the realisation of that product, and so that becomes another thing that you always have to battle: “Assembly time... oh well, let’s call up the drama teacher.”

◆◆◆

I’ve always found
that if I see a situation,
I just have to try and
sell it.

From early on,
whether it was trying to con
my brother and sister into
a Sunday night concert,
or saying to the grade 4s:
*Come on,
let’s do this play.*

Whatever it was,
that selling aspect
really prepared me for
having to sell
myself
as a professional within the school structure.

In the arts
you don’t have that
inbuilt
validity
of the basics.

Everyone knows that
you have to have
 maths,
 science,
 english,
 whatever,
and it just goes without saying.

You don't have to justify your
subject
and you don't have to justify *your*
self
as a practitioner.



There's this push at the moment in government funding to do all these marvellous, large scale events – Rock Eisteddfods, or street parades, or whatever the case may be. It's like the government are saying: "*Get a hundred people together and dress them up in glitzy costumes and have them march up and down and we'll give you five hundred dollars.*" So it's all about the product, the product, the product.

We were watching a celebration of Victorian schools the other night on television, and it looked great. The kids were all really talented and it was fantastic, and I was looking at it thinking: *That's just wonderful*. But at the same time I was thinking: *So, someone sat down and decided that the person dressed up as a teacup was going to march up and down, do two turns, and then walk offstage*. And so I really question the validity of that kind of educational experience. I've always been quite critical of that sort of process. I've found through the management experiences that I've had, that the process is always being undermined, because of the need to justify what I am doing in order to get somewhere, and to support the place of the arts within the school.



You learn from your experiences, and if you learn from your negative ones, then that to me is a big thing. If you can learn and grow and be strong, even though you've gone through those negative experiences, then surely you're going to be firmer in your belief, and in your self.



As time has gone on,

the government the education department the district office your principal –
everybody

is being expected to do
more.

And
the person that ends up doing the most
is the classroom teacher
because they're having to support
and validate
the work of everybody above them.

Everyone says:
I need this for the person above me
well if you're at the bottom of the heap
you produce the lot.

And yes
I feel like that's
a culture
that has developed within schools –
you need to do more
you can't just teach any more
and that will be okay,

That's alright for me
because I've always done that
but it's really awful, that
there is that perception –
people who just
teach
are slack.

◆◆◆

I have a great belief that you never stop learning. If you do think you know it all then you might as well stop, because you never can know it all, hence I think that professional reading, and viewing others' work, whether that be professional work or work of students, whatever – that process of learning from others is so important.

I will always remember this gentleman who was one of our lecturers at university, and who I had very little respect for. But because I'm the kind of person that I am, I still listened to him. I thought: *No, there's got to be a reason that you're here. There's got to be something I can take from this*, as I was giving up an hour of my time every week. And one day this fellow was talking about how we could approach students who were walking away from us or something. He said: "What would you do?"

I'll always remember that this other person in the class said: "We'd get Anna to yell at them, and then they'd stop."

So he said: "You could do that. But if you didn't have Anna's strength, then you wouldn't be able to achieve it. Maybe you could call out to them in a gentle tone, and walk towards them..."

That's when I realised that you may not agree with a person, and you may not believe in ninety percent of what they're saying or what they're advocating, but you can always take something from them.



If you want to work in isolation, it doesn't really matter who's around you, as long as they let you get on with it. But if you want to create something new, or something bigger, or more exciting, than what you can do as a sole practitioner, then you need to have people supporting you and working with you.

If we are trying to instil in students a non-competitive but productive culture, of "Yes we will succeed, yes we will strive, but we will not be striving at the expense of someone else", then that same culture would best be cultivated within the actual people who engender it – the staff. I don't think it is. I think the majority of people either don't say anything, or say something negative. I mean I'm not a victim of that generally, but I've seen it happen with other people. People do come up and recognise my work, but I sometimes feel that

it's easy to be recognised as an arts teacher, because the nature of what I do is very much up there, a showcase for a lot of student work. A lot of other people do work that is absolutely marvellous, but because it's not up on stage or it's not in the newsletter or whatever, people don't take the time to recognise it and say how wonderful it is. That's really sad.



When I left Frankland High, my professional ego was basically rather battered, and it didn't take very much to make me incredibly grateful for any sort of recognition of what I was trying to achieve. That was the major difference that I found when I arrived at Rosevale District. Suddenly the principal, the assistant principals, general staff members, students, and parents would actually formally or informally recognise what people were doing, and thank them, and say they appreciated it. These people were so ready to say if they thought something was fantastic. For example they will actually stand up in a staff meeting and say: "Isn't it great what Jan's been doing with her grade 4 class on aboriginal culture?" or something like that. That sort of experience was very precious for me, and came at the exact right moment for someone who was feeling rather vulnerable. It was really wonderful, to actually have that happen.

I get on the soapbox about the need to support staff, other colleagues, and students through recognition in a consistent and sincere way. You know, I write papers, I create little awards and certificates, all these sorts of things, because too often it seems we're ready to jump up and say when you've done it wrong, but we're very reticent to say when you've done it right. This is one of the wonderful things about Rosevale. It's not always consistent, and there are some people who are overlooked, but they might be caught up in the next wave of recognition. Generally speaking, positive recognition is really strong there, and that's been a major thing for me.

Rosevale District High is like schools used to be, before they got big and nasty.



I'm a person that goes in feeling positive, and I look for the positives, so when I came up against the negatives, I had to learn how to deal with them. That was enormous. So those stories of those experiences, where I was dealing with those things, they're the ones that really stick out for me. They stand out in the sense that I recognise from them that I **am strong**.

I'm stronger
than those people,
and
I
don't
need
a label on my forehead
that says:

A
S
T

*3*¹

to achieve something
positive.

3. Inside

In the end teaching is a secret enterprise and depends for its success on the maintenance of a safe place for those secret acts of teaching to occur. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 13)



At her fifth school,

(Rosevale District High)

Anna learned:
*that security means
not needing to fight for what you have.*

¹ 'Advanced Skills Teacher', in this case level 3 (further up the hierarchy than AST 1).

◆◆◆

1.

I have this wonderful love of teaching and love of students, which is so vital. If you don't like the students, don't do it. Go and be a chemist or something.

◆◆◆

I have this thing, where I say to the students: "I don't care what happens, as long as you try. That's the only thing that's important. There's no right in drama, there's no wrong, there's just trying." The students will then really get in and have a go, which is wonderful, but that doesn't just come automatically. You've got to build that trust with them, so that they are able to say that it is okay to try. I think teenagers find that really hard to do, that risk-taking thing, because they're really placing themselves out there.

I have a student who came to drama this year as a grade 10, having never done it before, which is bizarre in our state, but she came from a very little school. She found it extremely difficult. I actually verbalised it for her – I said: "This is the problem I think you're facing. In english or a subject like that, if you go away and write an essay, you brainstorm your ideas, you do the draft, you go back, you refine it and refine it probably four times, and then you pass it up for judgement. In drama, we improvise and we share ideas, and we share them in a public arena for a start, and then we improvise with others, and then we pass our *first* draft up – our first workshopping or rehearsal. We pass that up for judgement straight off, because we need feedback." For her that was a huge barrier that she had to get over – placing herself up for judgement from step one. That was really a new experience, and she said that was the biggest thing for her to learn. She's doing it now, which is really great – she's accepted the challenge.

◆◆◆

Schools
are very isolating
and I think
teachers often lose sight of the

*real
world*

and the realities
that are
out
there.

I've worked in business
I've had my own business
and I've worked for other businesses
in management positions
and just as a pleb worker –

*(pouring beers
stooking oats
manual labour
right through)*

I've done everything.

You just start to realise
that this is a
protected environment
that we offer students.

We do –
we protect them
from so many things.

I'm not saying
that we shouldn't
minimise the risks,
or that we shouldn't
protect them from harm

(physical, mental, emotional) –

but we should
make them aware
of the risks that
are there.

And that they should
have reality checks on
not in terms of what they can achieve

(because I'm a great believer in dreaming)

but more
what barriers they'll come up against
and so therefore what strategies
they're going to need to put in place

so that they can

*overcome
the barriers.*

◆◆◆

You see young people come into teaching, and they're doing things like – it seems really minor – but they're doing things like if they're female, they wear really trendy gear that is body hugging and revealing, that sort of thing. You think: *Well, you are not being professional.* When one such teacher mentioned being plagued by grade 10 boys, my honest and open approach was to talk to her about exactly that. I said: "There's a difference between your right to wear what you want, and the fact that you are a professional entering an environment that is different to the outside world. You have to modify and take into account the effect that you have on others."

I think that's it – it's that projecting outwards, rather than just thinking self. You can't open your mouth and let it come out if you're not prepared to back it up. I can say to students at the end of class: "Okay, nick off snotty bottoms", and they all laugh, and they think it's marvellous, and it's: *Oh, it's Miss White.* They know that's coming from a sense of fun, based on the respect I have for them, not from any kind of put-down. So as a practitioner I think that what some (especially younger, inexperienced) teachers see as too uptight or too old-fashioned is essentially very important and can never be trivialised. We have a huge responsibility, and if we don't take that responsibility seriously, we are just really putting young people in jeopardy. They are so impressionable, and if you are young and you're attractive, and you've got a fun personality, the kids are drawn to you. They want to be with you, so you have a huge influence, and if you're giving out the impression that it's okay to do things that will place them in moral or legal or physical jeopardy, then you are responsible for that, and you have to take that on board. I'm on the soapbox. I got a bit carried away there, but I think that's so incredibly important and it's something I've always stuck to.

◆◆◆

2.

Students are so important, and I think there is not enough focus upon what we do with them. It's this whole thing of the syllabus and the TCE² and TASSAB³ and timetables and budgets, all of which become so important within any school's operation. Sometimes it's the students who end up at the bottom of the needs list almost. I know that most management people would be absolutely horrified to think that was the case, but it's just the very nature of things. The staffing is cut down, there's less time and decisions have to be made more quickly. As there is less and less time, it's more and more up to the classroom teacher to remain very focussed on the students.



At Milton, I would walk down a corridor and if a student was doing something wrong – had their hat on, or was sitting on a bag rack or something like that – they would correct their behaviour. If I walked into someone else's classroom, and there was someone swinging on a chair or something, they would correct their behaviour.

It got to the point where I just forgot how I got to there. I forgot what steps went first, because it reached a point where students coming in to grade 7 at Milton would know that these were the standards that Miss White had, because their big brothers and sisters had told them.

I actually chose to move from Milton, because I'd been there six years or so I think, and I said: "Look, I've been here to the point where it's too easy. I'm losing touch with how you start out, and how you establish the behaviour management." So I sure revisited step one in every scenario when I went to Eastbridge.

² Tasmanian Certificate of Education The qualification all students receive when they complete school.

³ Tasmanian Secondary Assessment Board: The organisation that administers the TCE



Everybody should teach
at a school like Eastbridge,
at least once in their lives.

You feel like if
you can do that
you can handle anything.

I think anybody that teaches in a difficult school should be given more time. They should get more staff, they should have a lower timetable and they should also be given a monetary incentive for doing it. If you're at Eastbridge or wherever it may be, we should reward you for the fact that we're not there. Even if it comes down to salary sacrifice, we should all give two percent or something, I don't know. After being there, and then seeing these people that sit at Paterson College or somewhere like that – I mean I'm not saying they don't work hard, but they don't have the emotional pressure. I don't know, it's cloistered, I'm sure there are times when you do have to face up to behaviour management issues and things like that in a college, but it doesn't appear to be anything like the kinds of things you're doing in an average classroom. I mean I've walked into Eastbridge and had students pretend to masturbate in front of me, so when you have that experience, you think: *Well everything else seems kind of easy after that*. There are a whole different set of rules that you have to play by, and you have to be not just a step ahead of them, you have to be about twenty five steps ahead, because they know every trick in the book and they teach each other.

At the end of my first
week
I stood in the office
and the office lady said:
So how was your week Anna?

and I
burst
into
tears
and said:
I can't teach

*I have no control
I'm useless
I'm resigning.*

That was the end of my first week.

It really made me refocus, and I think in doing that, I refined my practice.



Working at Eastbridge was amazing. Here was a situation where the students were astoundingly strong. If they hated you, they'd be telling you to get whatevered, and if they loved you... I can remember this poor boy, I put him on detention, and he was very distraught about this. I don't know what it was for, something minor like answering me back after three warnings. One of my very loyal boy prefects came upon this child giving me a mouthful, so he scruffed him by the shirtfront, and had him up against a wall, saying: "Don't you speak to Miss White like that." Of course, you can't have that sort of thing happen, so I had to talk to him about it, but that's what it was like. If they gave you their loyalty, it was a hundred percent. I really loved it there, and I would have been quite happy to stay there, but it was so exhausting.

I've still got students from Eastbridge that contact me and come and visit, so that's really lovely. It was a great experience, and it was really good to get my feet back on the ground. It really grounded you in terms of always remembering where you start from. Never forget the basics, because it's a waste of time having big ambitions about what you're going to teach, if you don't actually have the students' respect.



A lot of staff at Rosevale, management people as well, were quite surprised at how much responsibility I gave to students, but the empowering of students is so important. I feel that the education system that we generate within our culture is very much a person sitting back and setting themselves up as the authority – the giver of information, the assessor, and the judge. It's like: *I sit*

in judgement on you, as to how you have achieved, how you have come up to the mark. I don't believe that the person that has the most power is always the person that has the most ability or the most capability, and that's why I'm a strong advocate of the students being empowered to take on leadership roles.

I find it really difficult to think that there are students in grade 10 who are told: "You will do as I say. The content of your essay will be the information I have given you, and if you have a different point of view you will obviously be marked down." That sort of attitude is fairly typical, unfortunately. Those same students are then expected next year to make decisions about their futures, and to enter into the big wide world of college, or the workforce, or unemployment. Whatever it is, suddenly they've gone from this totally closeted and suppressed environment to one of freedom and then people wonder why they can't cope. That's why I feel it's important to give them those opportunities, and allow them to take those risks without the scary consequences, before they go out there and face it all for real.



The students at Rosevale have just finished reviewing their production. In their reviews, which were six pages plus, very seldom did they mention me at all. Now I did everything from write the blessed script, think of the ideas, right through to interviews, and I was touching base on everything. It was an exhausting experience, and so there's a part of me that goes: *Well it would have been nice if I'd gotten a mention.* The music teacher, the guy who operated the data show, the guy who helped with stage management – they all got a mention, but Miss White – none.

I was telling my principal about it, and she said: "How fantastic that you've empowered the kids to that extent."

Then I thought afterwards: *That's really cool.* They believed so strongly in what I'd told them they were doing, like: "You *are* the media people. You *are* the stage management team. You need to meet these criteria, and if you

don't this is what's going to happen in terms of letting the team down..." I just blended into the woodwork.

♦ ♦ ♦

3.

My big thing is the students. If they believe in you, you've got to believe in yourself. If they believe in what you're doing for them, and they value it, then how can you say to them they're wrong?

♦ ♦ ♦

The students
were my first big positive
and actually listening to them
and taking on board their response
to me as a person.

People say
children can be cruel,
which they can be.

They are the cruellest judges
because they are so honest
but then, of course
you have the greatest respect
for whatever they say –
because you know
they're being absolutely honest.

They're not
playing
any
political
game necessarily, and
hopefully they
don't learn that
too
quickly.

♦ ♦ ♦

A few months ago, some students and I went to move some furniture in one of the rooms. I started to shift this filing cabinet and then thought: *Oh, I'm not supposed to do this.* I stopped, and said to the students: "Right, I think now is the time to tell you guys – I'm pregnant."

They were all: "Oh, that's fabulous!" and: "Oh, I knew you were!" There was all this sort of crossfire, and then from the back of the room comes this voice: "I just thought you were getting fat."

We all laughed, and it was just beautiful, because I thought how wonderful, to have a student that can be so honest. I mean, that's what he thought, and he didn't think: *Oh, I'm talking to a teacher, I have to modify what I say.* I know there are some practitioners, even that I work with now, who would see that as a major lack of respect, and would say that the students should know that they shouldn't speak like that and make personal comment. My thing is that we have a far more honest relationship, because Brett feels comfortable saying that to me. Afterwards he said that he was just speaking his honest thought, and it was lovely, we all laughed. That to me is what it's all about.



My husband always complains about how much time I give, because I often have students come home here and we rehearse, or I'll tape soundtracks for them or something like that, and he usually gets roped into things, and he has always complained.

So I asked him to come on a school trip with me to the mainland, and it went for I think it was eight days or something, and when we got back, he said: "Now I understand." He's the same sort of person, in that he loves kids and he enjoys their company and recognises just how much they give. So many people focus on what they are giving to the students, and overlook what the students give back.



I came to realise that as an actual teacher in a classroom, who I was as a person was really quite a positive thing, and that was a huge growing thing, because it gave me all sorts of confidence. I'd been so used to playing roles all my life, for grandparents, or my teacher or whoever it was, I'd play these roles. But then suddenly here were these people, who not just accepted me, but actually gave me validation for who I was as a person. That gave me strength. So the students actually empowered *me*, to challenge a lot of things that were put in place.

It was the students' response to me and their support, along with parents and other staff members, that were key to that gaining of strength. You watch people who take on the role of the teacher as they walk in the door and leave their personality outside. They're making life difficult for themselves in the long run. It might seem easier but I don't know, I just feel the rewards are less.

♦ ♦ ♦

A student will tell you
where to get off
they will *shut you out*
they will *not communicate*
they will *not participate*
they will *withdraw*

and you are always

opening yourself up
and offering

and all you are asking for
is for them to be
involved
and get something out of it.

So if they do,
how amazing is that
compared to
someone giving you
a pat on the back

and saying:

*You're a good person,
we're going to promote you*

or

*We're going to give you this
extra job to do
in recognition of your good work*

I mean that's all
important
as I said

but to me it's
meaningless
in comparison to a student
who walks out the door and says:
*Thanks
Miss
White –
that was great.*

So,
if you see them
running down the path
to your classroom,
what more can you
ask?

4. Conclusion

A strength grows within you,
as you start to believe
that you are doing it right,
and you are
justified
in fighting for these things.

Also you just get sick of
you just really get tired of
those people
making judgements without consultation, without discussion, without
any recognition that your point of view might have some validity.

I got tired of it,
and I thought
that I could just give up
and be one of those people
that sit and say:
"Oh well, I'll just do what I do within my classroom"
which is a perfectly

comfortable
way of operating,
and it's fine for a lot of people.

But then I thought:
No, that's not good enough.
I'm not going to be
one of those people
who sit and whinge in the staffroom
about what's wrong,
and do nothing about it.

At least I'm going to say at the end of the day
I
tried.

♦ ♦ ♦

As a teacher, I live in two different professional places. One is the relational world inside the classroom where I co-construct meaning with my students. The other is the abstract world where I live with everyone outside my classroom, a world where I meet all the other aspects of the educational enterprise such as the philosophies, the techniques, the materials, and the expectations that I will enact certain educational practices. While each of these places is distinctive, neither is totally self-contained (Craig, 1995, p. 16).

♦ ♦ ♦

Inside and
outside –
like fingerprints
these lines
curl and intersect
make her
mark her.

*(but
fingerprints
never
change).*

Inside and
outside –
these are lines
of a different sort.

Borders perhaps?

*(If so
these are borders
traced
in sand).*

Borders divide
but can be crossed.
Borders
change.

*I can watch
as Anna retraces
them
shifts their meaning
and
know that it could all shift
again
(if the tide comes in).*

Or

inside and
outside –
perhaps they are
just names
after all,
and being a teacher is more
than tidy
dichotomies and
metaphors.

7.

Sarah Morgan

I've been thinking about my own teaching experience and myself as a teacher a lot more deeply than I have before, so I've found that really good. I have enjoyed this thinking, and it will help me now, that I've been able to reassess myself, take stock, and look at where I am at the moment and why. That's good I think, it's a good point to go on with and build on, so I've found it quite important. (Sarah, Interview 3, p.15)

1. Introduction

Below is the timeline Sarah completed in the initial phase of the research:

Early 1980s	As a child with an insecure, unstable family background, I really related to a teacher that 'noticed me' and built up my confidence in creative writing and performing (grades 5/6).
Late 1980s	I loved drama in high school, and this built on what had started for me in primary school. I had lots of fun, positive drama experiences. I also still liked English, and saw both subjects as 'something I could do well'. One teacher (an English teacher) and I developed a fairly close relationship. He told me I'd be a 'great teacher', and gave me constant encouragement and interest. I had decided by grade 9, that I wanted to be a drama teacher.
Early 1990s	My interest fell away a bit (hormones, moving out of home, experimentation, and other distractions), but I loved poetry (due to English Literature at college). I was accepted into university, but I deferred. After

	<p>about 18 months of this, I got bored and decided to go to uni after all.</p> <p>Through uni, I formed my ideas and reasoning as to why I wanted to be a teacher – to help and teach kids (especially struggling ones), and to give acknowledgement and encouragement to kids like me, because I knew how strong that could be. Teaching ‘kids’ was more important to me than ‘teaching my subject’.</p>
Mid 1990s	<p>My first job – my first year teaching enabled me to really re-establish myself personally. I was able to bring my personality into my teaching – something I had not felt able to do at uni and on most pracs¹. The school I have been working at has really reaffirmed my beliefs about teaching and has been a very positive experience for me.</p>
Late 1990s	<p>The next major experience at the school was my first year as ‘the only drama teacher’ at school. This was also my first year teaching grades 5 & 6. I had to write a new drama program for years 5 – 8, based on a model of 8 week modules, rather than a whole year model. A big learning curve!</p>
2001	<p>My first ‘proper’ school production. I had shied away from this in the past, but took the plunge, having been told at the end of the previous year by the Assistant Principal that “It’d be nice to see a school production next year.” I found the experience enjoyable and successful for me and the kids, and we all learned a lot!</p>

¹ ‘Prac’ (short for ‘practicum’) is a colloquial term in common use in Tasmania, and refers to student teacher experiences.

2. Values

Teaching, like other social action, takes place within a political context where certain, sometimes conflicting, values are pursued. Teaching is not a value-neutral activity. It is premised on certain values and promotes certain, although not always the same, values. (Elliot & Hatton, 1998, p. 52)



Values? Do I have these things in the classroom? Am I even supposed to have them? I'd always thought teachers were meant to be neutral. But to what extent can I ever behave in a 'neutral' way? Have I ever, until now, even questioned the values I might promote through my teaching? More to the point, have I ever been in a situation where I have needed to? Or have I just taken them for granted? Or do they only become visible when they no longer match the values of those around me?



I had this maths teacher in grade 10
a female maths teacher
and she was a feminist
and that's good
fair enough
and I remember her
asking me
what I wanted to do.

She told me that wanting to be a teacher
especially an english and drama teacher
was a very
feminine
traditional thing to want to do
and that I wanted to do that because I'd been
conditioned to think that I wanted to do that
and maybe I should try and think of some other area
that I might be able to go into.

That was a very big thing

back when I was at that level of school anyway,
they had a big ‘girls in education’ thing,
wanting to make us all into truck drivers or whatever,
and that was okay
that was a good thing
but the way she was doing it was just
stupid.

Even though she had values that I now
half
agree with,
what a thing that was
to do to a child.

It’s off.

Luckily I liked drama and english enough by grade 10
to go:
Silly old bag
and not listen to her anyway.

◆◆◆

**My values are very important to me, as you know. I don’t want my
teaching to conflict with those values at all.**

◆◆◆

A lot of other schools have this image that they want to project and maintain
to the community – of being a high achieving, academic school. Those
schools do really value the curriculum, and that’s where their middle class
values really come into it. It’s a narrow experience. I think that school is an
experience as well, and it’s a really important, significant experience. If this
experience is all just that academic stuff being measured and tested, I don’t
think that’s the kind of experience I’d want to give children. It’s got to be
much more of a whole learning experience.

If I’d gone for a different kind of school to where I am now, then maybe my
experiences would have been different. I had a friend following me through
uni who actually went to the school that I did my internship at, and she quit

teaching after her first year. She doesn't teach anymore. I mean that could have happened to me, with my poor fragile ideals about why I was a teacher. Being told how to teach and what my values should be wouldn't have been very good.

♦ ♦ ♦

Through uni and through my internship, I got used to being careful of what I said, and making sure that it wasn't too different.

♦ ♦ ♦

That was a really important
yet
unpleasant experience,
my internship.

*That was a really important
and
difficult experience,
my internship.*

When I told my supervising teacher from a previous prac which school I was going to for my internship, he said: "Oh, I don't think that's going to be very good."

I said: "Why? Those sort of schools are supposed to be really easy to teach in."

My internship was not very good. I went to a very traditional middle class high school, completely different to where I'm working now, and learned a big lesson. That's not the sort of school for me. I felt very restricted and as though I was being dictated to, about how things were supposed to be in my classroom. For example, one of my prac supervisors said at one point that it probably wouldn't work, if the kids sat on the floor in a circle and I sat on the floor with them.

It was awful – they didn't think I did very well, and I just didn't understand what I'd done wrong. I think I was feeling disempowered by all of that, and I

was very intimidated. It was like my whole experience of university. Before I went to uni I took a year off, and lived a quite alternative, experimental kind of lifestyle, and then when I came to uni I had to fit in, and that was really hard.

In that school, my values and my whole approach were completely confronted. I was really at a crisis point and thinking: *“Oh my god, this school emulates the curriculum, and the curriculum seems to be written from this perspective.”* I was having a big crisis about these middle class values. So there was a lot of that going on at that time.



Listening to Sarah talk about her doubts and questions unsettles me. I'm not unsettled by what she says, but by what it uncovers about me. Why didn't I have questions like these?

Before going on my internship, I discovered that another student in my year group had put in for the same school. Our course coordinator had made the decision that I should go there, rather than this other student. I found this out on my first meeting at the school with Michael Green, who was to be my supervising teacher at Paterson College. I don't remember exactly what he said, but it was along the lines of: “The course coordinator thought you would fit in better here – it's more your sort of school.”² At the time, I didn't question this assessment of who I was and how I was seen by others as a teacher. Now, I do. Maybe it was my style that was seen as more appropriate for the setting. But given that my teaching experience up to that point amounted to a grand total of ten weeks in a classroom, did I really have a style? But what else could it be – and what ‘type’ of school was this?

In part, I think these questions were left unasked (until now) because I didn't think of them. In part though, perhaps they were unasked because I didn't want to think about the answers. I didn't want to ask any questions that might

² I should state that Michael also said he wanted to take both of us.

require me to examine not only my teaching practice, but also what kind of teacher, and what kind of person, I might be.

♦♦♦

Towards the end of university, when I began thinking about actually having to go out there and teach a curriculum, I got a little bit disillusioned. I felt that it was a very white middle class, even masculine, curriculum that I was going to have to teach, and I really questioned myself and what I was doing, and what sort of teacher I was going to be. I managed to come around to justifying it in myself, but I did question it and I thought about it a lot more. Before that, I hadn't really thought about why I wanted to be a drama and english teacher, but I did have to think about it then, because I was aware that there were some aspects of it that I was uncomfortable with. I had to question that curriculum, and question myself.

♦♦♦

I put a lot of myself into myself as a teacher. It's my personality and everything, and I couldn't really teach something that I didn't believe in. If I can't feel comfortable with what I've got to teach and the way I've got to teach, I don't think I'd be very happy. I have to be comfortable with what I'm doing in the classroom, because it's so much me in there, it's not just the teacher.

♦♦♦

I became very conscious of, and began to question, the values of the curriculum – what they were doing with the particular wording of different criteria, and so on. I was really worried about that, and teaching values to kids, or putting my values into what I was teaching or the way I was teaching. That was so hard. You've got to try and be as conscious of it as you possibly can, and allow kids to have their own values too, rather than saying: "No *this* is right." That's hard, I think. It's really hard.

At that time too, internship and the end of uni, I got a lot of those values placed on me. I was being told that the way I was doing it wasn't particularly correct or proper or right, and so I was questioning that. These values just didn't fit with my values. That made me question everything else, it was like: "Oh shit, maybe I'm stuck in this whole thing."

All of that was a long time ago though. None of those nightmares came true really.



Imagine that a teacher sees that classroom practices make school life easier for boys than for girls. The teacher has some ideas about how to redress the girls' disadvantage but does not advocate or implement them, as this would be political. To choose to do nothing is, however, to make a political choice: it is to acquiesce in, if not endorse, a practice that fits with a particular political scheme of things in which girls and women are systematically disadvantaged. Certainly there may be cases where prudence restrains the teacher, but the desire to not make waves is utterly different from the desire to maintain a neutral stance, although believing that the latter desire is the real motive can be an effective rationalisation of the former. And, of course, there will be some teachers who simply do not care. (Elliot & Hatton, 1998, p. 53)



Out of school, I tend to just leave it. I mean I do what I've got to do out of school, as far as extra work, but then I'm just gone. I'm not the teacher anymore. I'm just myself again.



I'm asking kids to question themselves – where they're coming from, and their values – but I'm also constantly doing that myself. I don't like to think that I would influence somebody else's values really. With kids, I try to educate them to have harmonious values, so that they can function in society, but as far as particular issues are concerned, if I can educate them and make them aware of things, that's good, but actually influencing their opinions and telling them what's right and wrong is not where I want to come from at all. It is very important to me that I do what I'm asking them to do. That's where my whole approach to teaching, what I teach, and how I structure my classes is all from – that self-questioning.

So that's very important to me,
putting my values in there,
but trying
not
to influence kids
with those values.

I try to be conscious
and I do my best
not
to take it for granted
that I'm right
and they're wrong,

and I could be wrong
but I think
some people
just
don't
think
about
that.

3. Where I'm coming from

For my internship, I had it all planned out. I'd almost worked out how to play this role, how to wear this mask. I would take very seriously the advice of my prac supervisor from the previous year: "Don't take it too personally. It isn't you in there. They don't know you. They just know the teacher." I just had to remember what it was teachers were supposed to be like, and I'd be okay.

◆◆◆

My earliest memories
of school
are of being
a bit of an
outsider.

No really close
friends
no particularly close
relationships with teachers,
I always seemed to be
the
new
girl.

◆◆◆

I found university very oppressive, in as far as being able to be myself. When I first came to university, I offended a lot of people with things I said, and basically learned to keep my mouth shut and my head down and just do what I had to do to get through. I mean we had a lot of interesting talks in tutorials or whatever, and I totally valued university and what I learned, but by the time I graduated, I was a lot more... I don't know.

◆◆◆

In my first year at university, I had my nose pierced, and I used to get around in way-out gear. I was told that I would have to take my nose stud out for pracs, and I was told very clearly what sort of thing I should wear when teaching. At the time I did anything they told me to, because I didn't know any better. I felt quite naïve.

I found that very oppressive, being told to look a certain way. These days I feel a lot more capable of dealing with that kind of attitude, but when I was a first year uni student, especially when most people around me seemed to be agreeing with whatever it was I was being told to do, I didn't know how to

deal with that. I felt very conformist. I felt very restricted, and I felt as though that was the way I had to be in order to get a job, which was why I'd gone there in the first place.

♦ ♦ ♦

It's not that
I'm not good on
authority.

But
I'm not good on
meaningless
authority.

♦ ♦ ♦

Being able to choose how I look is an expression of my personality. I like to be able to express my personality, express my beliefs and express my lifestyle.

♦ ♦ ♦

Dave, one of my lecturers at the university, was great. He could just read me like a book, and all the way through uni he was brilliant for me. He always took me seriously, and always respected where I was coming from. He was one of those people that I needed. I felt very much like a fish out of water, because uni hasn't been a vision in my family or anything like that. If it hadn't been for someone like him, there were times when I just would have gone: "Stuff it", but he always had faith in me, and he always respected the way I did things.

I was all over the place a little bit at uni, because it was such a big drastic change. I was living in a share house and working one or two jobs at a time, so uni was only part of my life. Some lecturers expected it to be the be-all and end-all of my life, and that just wasn't possible. Dave was great because any time I went to his office, he was never too busy. He would always say: "Oh

come in and sit down and have a talk.” It was brilliant and he really encouraged me.

He knew that I wouldn’t fit in to a certain kind of school and that I would do very well at a different sort of school. He never explicitly said that to me, but he steered me in that direction. When I thought about it afterwards, I thought: *Yeah, Dave was right.* Even when I had that really bad internship, he talked to me and said: “They just didn’t understand.” He still respected what I was doing, and still upheld that I was okay, and I wasn’t doing anything wrong. So that was good – having someone that had faith in me, that I looked up to as well.



When I got to Northwood Regional High, the school I’ve been at since graduation, the attitude was that if they could put you in a classroom and you could survive, they thought that was good. Whether it was because I didn’t take my subject as seriously as other people might have, or I didn’t take things as personally or whatever, I survived.

The staff were great, and really supportive. I got heaps of professional development, all the time, and teachers actually used to put things on my desk, resources and ideas and whatever, and talk to me about how things were going. It was – and is – excellent. The kids were a battle, but the administrative and teaching staff were just brilliant to work with. I felt really supported. Basically, you did whatever you could do that would work with the kids that you had, so I felt that I had complete control. My approach was *my* approach. So I found my first year very free, and very good.



*I’ve
been
lucky.*

If I'd been given
direction
and told that
I had to
teach in a certain way
or whatever
that would have been
difficult
for me,
but
it
hasn't
happened.

*I'm
very
lucky –*

I landed in
the
right
place.

If I'd been placed
in a
bigger school
in my first
couple of years
I wouldn't
have
lasted
very long,
I don't think.

*I
was
lucky.*

Now,
where I am
now
with my teaching,
I think
I'd be able to
cope.

*So yeah,
I'm
very
lucky.*



I got to Northwood and saw what they were doing, and just went: *Oh phew, this is okay*. It's a small school, and I think one of the big things is that everyone on the staff counts, and most people have some sort of a role besides being a teacher in a classroom.

It would be so hard, having a meeting in a really big school with fifty plus staff, it would be so difficult. If you did have a concern or an idea, expressing it would be so much harder. In our staff meetings, we go around the circle at the end, and anyone who's got anything to say, a concern or an idea, gets a chance to say it, and it is discussed. I like that.

Open-mindedness has always been a really good thing for us at our school. You have to be open-minded there. I mean people can go there and not try to be open-minded, but they won't be successful. We have to be open-minded, and experiment with things, and interpret the curriculum loosely. I can't remember who it is at our school, I think it's the principal, who always says that you don't ever stop learning. I think that's a really important thing, and a lot of teachers seem to feel that they've stopped, and they do the same thing year after year after year. They must have got it perfect to keep repeating it. Either that or they're just sick of their job and just do the same thing over and over again because they don't think about it as much any more, but I'm always learning. I'm hoping that I'll never get it perfectly right as far as teaching is concerned, because it's more of a challenge that way. That's my approach to my own teaching practices – I always look at new ideas. Some I reject out of hand, and some I resist at first, but I'll always give these things a try, if they're coming from a good intention or background or value.

I've been working at Northwood for a few years now, and I feel even more justified in expressing my opinion, and knowing that it is going to be valued, and I'm not just some 'rookie' person now. It is taken seriously. So that is

excellent, being able to say or do something and see that it counts, and see that it has an effect.

♦ ♦ ♦

I'm a pretty different person out of school. A lot of myself is in my role as a teacher, because I'm very lucky that I'm free to do that, but as a teacher, I'm a lot of things that I'm not in my own personal life.

I have interests in my own personal life that I like to give time to and pursue.

I don't think that I could ever let school take over all of that personal time.

I don't think that I ever will.

I hope I never do.

♦ ♦ ♦

Our principal is also very, very left of field. He's very against traditional conformist kind of classrooms. We've got this one block of rooms where all the grade 9 and 10 classrooms are, and there's an IT lab in there as well and that sort of thing. It gets to the point where there'll be three grade 9/10 classes on at the same time, and the kids will all just be in different areas doing their thing, and all you do is just walk around, and help kids here and there in different rooms.

It was the end of the year, about a week before the grade 10s left, and they were all finishing off work. One day, I was in a class and the principal walked down the hall, and he bumped into me and said: "Isn't this great? Isn't this great? You don't see any traditional classrooms at all here, it's just completely open and relaxed. I know you've always been like that, but it's just such a change in here."

Even if he's got visitors to the school, it's not like you have to have all the kids with their hats off at the desk looking like they're working. On my internship my classrooms were too noisy and they were being whispered about, but the principal at Northwood thinks a noisy classroom is a creative classroom, and there's learning going on, so he's very much like me too.

That's why I felt that I could come out a lot more and get back into my own comfortable personality as a teacher, because the school that I'm working in encouraged me to do that.

◆◆◆

I don't want to
just go in and
deliver
someone
else's
idea.

I want to actually
have it
and
own it
and
make it
mine
as well.

◆◆◆

When I was growing up, I had a father who was a very traditional, religious kind of person. I always saw an inequity in there, between men and women, and so I've always had this really strong thing about respect and equality. I guess that's come right through.

It's very important to me to have respect. I mentioned this a while ago about respect –someone who has been teaching for twenty years can't just step in and tell me how to do it. I need to respect what they do to listen to what they say. If I'm given that same respect, and not just the everyday kind of: "You're a human being, I respect you" but actually because of what I do or the way I'm contributing to the school, then that is very validating for me. I guess that's my intimidation with the middle class thing. I mean, you've got these people that are from different backgrounds to me, and they're people that have been teaching for a long time and they're worthy of respect, so the

fact that they show me that same respect and I can have an input is really good.

♦ ♦ ♦

I just want my job to be something that challenges me, and something that I can enjoy, and something that can make me live comfortably and let me do the things that I want to do with the rest of my life. I definitely don't want it to be my sole focus. It's just there to help me do what I want to do with the rest of my life.

♦ ♦ ♦

Northwood really has influenced the way that I teach, because I've been so free to experiment. I haven't been told: "This is the curriculum, and this is what we teach in grade 7, and this is what we teach in grade 8." I've had a lot more input into everything, and the staff are very supportive and experimental. I wrote here:

*All of this
is why
I am
the kind of teacher I am
and why
I would choose
to continue working
in a school like
this.*

*I hope to always be
working
in schools that are just on the
outer,
and never really in a
successful
flowing school.*

*Those schools don't really
want
to change or
try anything
different,*

*whereas schools
like Northwood really do.*

*and there's not so much
the concern about
correctness
or appearance
or academic achievement,*

*but it's more about
teaching the students in a way that they
need to be taught, which is much more
relevant,*

and that's definitely

*where
I'm
coming
from.*

4. The important things

Look confident, even if I wasn't. Know my subject. Be enthusiastic about it. Previous supervisor's voice echoes in head again: "If you aren't enthusiastic about it, how can you expect the students to be?" I had found it hard, in that previous experience, to be enthusiastic about getting grade 10 students to do short, funny, mime skits. How could I talk to the students about the value of these ("If they're really good, you can show them in the end of year assembly!") exercises, when I couldn't see the value myself? Appear to believe in what I was teaching, even if I didn't. Looking back now, I wonder about that teacher. Had she been appearing to believe in this for so long that she had actually convinced herself? My internship would be different. I'd been given much more scope to do what I wanted (within the confines of the mandated curriculum, obviously). We could do something real.

◆◆◆

*Dominated by kits and dittos, increasingly mechanised and
impersonal, most of our classrooms cannot sustain human*

*relationships of sufficient intimacy to support the risks, the trust,
and the expression that learning requires. (Grumet, 1988, p. 56)*

◆◆◆

I think I've said it before –
I see education
as a life experience.

School is an experience,
it's not just
something that you have
to go and do
to get a job.

There are a lot
of people in education at the moment
that are trying to approach it like that –

school is a job factory and you have to teach job skills
and that's part of it, but I definitely don't think it's the
most important thing.

You're in school
for a long time, and so

there's
got
to
be
some
good
in
that.

◆◆◆

The teacher that I mentioned on my time line was my grade 5 & 6 teacher. In my mind as a child, he was the first teacher to really notice me. Previously I had just tried to blend into the wallpaper as much as possible, and had no memories of standing out for being particularly good at anything. This teacher was able to draw me out of my shell by noticing my abilities and talents, and encouraging me to develop them – namely in creative writing and performance through class activities and simple games.

Another thing this teacher did for me was get to know me, and talk and joke with me during class, really showing that he liked me. Whenever my mother went to parent-teacher nights, she'd come back glowing with positive remarks such as: "I'd have a class full of Sarahs if I could." This had never happened before, and really boosted my confidence and made me feel good about school. Overall I think that the main thing that he did was really connect with me on an individual level. I think he saw that I needed that, and he was a young, just starting out teacher and he had a sense of humour, and so on, and that's what encouraged me to communicate with him. As a kid at that stage of my life, I was definitely crying out for attention and encouragement, and I guess I just got that from him.

Luckily, I was in this teacher's class for two years, and I really feel this prepared me for high school by giving me a lot more confidence in myself and a much more positive feeling towards school. It also influenced my future schooling in that I had found something I felt I was good at, therefore I tried anything in drama and took risks that I'm sure I would never have done otherwise. That shaped my future relationships with teachers as I was going through high school, which in turn shaped the way that I develop relationships with kids now. So he's obviously had a really big influence on me.

♦ ♦ ♦

When I first started teaching I thought my second option for a career would be social work. It took me about twelve months to realise that there's absolutely no way I could be a social worker.

♦ ♦ ♦

To me, the most important part of the curriculum is the hidden curriculum – the social skills, opportunities, experiences and relationships that teachers facilitate. I know that I feel this because of the huge impact that primary school teacher was able to have on me in such a simple way.

The hidden curriculum is the way that you teach. It's all the social education, it's educating kids to actually be able to function in the classroom in the first place, and it's seeing the classroom and the school as a microcosm of the rest of society. You're teaching them how to be part of a community, and that's very important. You also teach them to think about themselves. For example, you can teach them about critical literacy and critical thinking, and you can provide them experiences in that area, and then hopefully that might relate to how they think about other things. It might make them stop and think a bit in other areas as well. It's how those sorts of skills relate to the rest of their life, instead of just what they produce at school. It's about social skills as well, and giving them a sense of worth in themselves.

You don't have
an
assessment criterion
that says:

*"Has
a
good
self-image
and
self-esteem"*

but that's the
sort of thing
that you try
and teach them.

It's
not
really
measured.



When the other drama teacher left Northwood, and I became the only drama teacher, I was a little bit excited. I didn't feel too scared about it, because of the supportive network at the school. The intimidating thing, though, was that the school at the time was making a big change – we were merging with the

primary school next door, so we were becoming a kindergarten to grade 10 school. I was now teaching drama from grades 5 to 10, rather than just 7 to 10. Also, rather than having grades 5 to 8 all year, these students now only had an eight week block of drama, so it was a complete change. So we were working through that, and none of us knew whether it was going to work.

I can remember having to write the drama programs, and thinking: *Well shit, what is important?*, so that I could narrow it down to eight weeks. I rewrote everything. It really made me look at what I value, and at first I decided the social skills were a lot more important, so I really skewed my programs to that. I was trying to teach drama skills as well, as far as structure of scenes and different techniques like tableau and so on, but we would always do that through topics like bullying. As we went on (and the kids taught me a lot too), I had to go back and rewrite certain aspects to teach them specific skills and include more performance, because I've found that younger kids love to perform. So I'm trying to find a balance at the moment, between the performance skills and the social skills that I want to teach. It's really hard, with only eight weeks, to find that balance.



Numeracy and literacy are held as things that are, and must be, very important. But you've got to say: *What is literacy?* For example, you can say that literacy is just being able to read and write, but that's not necessarily so. We get some kids that come through that have no chance of leaving grade 10 able to read and write, so what kind of literacy can we teach them?

I'm lucky that I teach in the humanities area, because our curriculum is actually quite general and loosely structured, so there is a lot of freedom in there. The assessment criteria that we have to use are just there, as far as I'm concerned. They're just these things that are there, and you can interpret them in so many ways by getting kids to do so many different things, and there isn't a set lot of things that kids should do. To demonstrate that they can read and write, they don't necessarily have to be able to write an essay. I don't know if

that would fit in some people's minds. For me, I try to look at the whole picture a bit more and not just look at the written curriculum. The written curriculum is only one part of what we do in school, and I don't value it any more or less than the other things we do.



I always try to teach individuals, rather than just a group of kids. When they know that you're interested in them and that you like them, which is what happened to me when I was at school, they're much more likely to actually go: "Okay I can do this." The individual approach is good, because you can get underneath the surface a bit with some of the kids who really need you to. That's why I know every kid's name in the classroom, or try to, and try to get around and actually have some sort of individual communication with all of them.

It seems from what I've been saying, that you have to be friends with the students to successfully be able to teach, and I don't believe that. You're not going to make friends with every individual kid and I wouldn't try to either, but if I can provide them with experiences and try to engage them in that individual way, then I think that's just as important. You can't just sit and chat with kids and be friends with them, you've got to actually be teaching them as well, and I make that very clear. I like to have an informal relationship with kids, but there's a line and they know that there's a line.



When I see some of the other drama teachers around, who seem to devote their whole lives to the arts, I admire that so much. I feel a tinge of guilt that I'm not anywhere near that, but I think that's just the way I am.



There was this boy who I had this year in one of my grade 8 module groups. With the grade 8 students, I usually teach the technical aspects of drama, where they get to learn about how to use lights properly, and they have to do a little practical test where they can operate the lights, and then they put together a sound, light, and image piece, and do a performance. There was this boy, who I hadn't really had much before, and he was a big boy, a big beefy boy, and he said to me: "I've got drama next module Miss Morgan."

I said: "Oh, have you Aaron?"

"Yeah. I hate drama."

"Oh, well this will be fun then, won't it Aaron?"

That was my reply to him, because in drama generally, when it's compulsory, they're either going to love it or hate it, I accept that. But as the module went on, he was able to specialise in doing the technical things, which he's been doing very well. Of course he's done a little bit of acting and stuff like that as well, but we did a performance and he became my main 'lighting guy'. He came to all of the rehearsals, and he was looking forward to drama. He was learning responsibility, he was out of his comfort zone in an area that he would not choose (he wouldn't even look into the drama room before), and he was actually being creative and solving problems and being so responsible. He's a kid with a bit of a behaviour problem, but there was nothing like that in drama.



I had this boy Nathan in one of my grade 9 classes this year. He's a really talented drama student, but he can be a real pain. He and I have been having hassles all year – I've been nagging him, and he's been saying that I've been picking on him. He's a really hyperactive child, and if he's not engaged the whole time, then within 30 seconds he's being destructive somewhere in the classroom. One day he knocked his tooth out with a tambourine because I left the room for thirty seconds to get a costume or something like that.

He's a strange child, and he's got some bad influences too, at home. He's got this dad, who doesn't live with them, and he rings Nathan up every once in a

while. He actually told him how to make a little bomb over the phone one day, and weird stuff like that, so he's got these other influences outside school that you've got no control over.

We were talking at the end of this year, because I knew that I had him for home group and two subjects next year. I said: "Nathan, would you cry if you knew you had me for three classes next year?"

He went: "Oh, no I don't think so."

We'd just been talking about how he drives me completely insane, so I said to him: "Even though you've driven me completely insane all year, I still like you."

He replied: "Oh, okay. Actually I think I get into the least trouble in your classes."

So when it comes down to it, we've still got a pretty decent relationship. We don't actually hate each other, and he doesn't really feel persecuted by me. He knows that I like him. That's why that individual approach really works.

◆◆◆

I value education,
because I think it
empowers
people.

I know
it empowered me
to be able to
make decisions
and achieve
what
I
wanted
to
achieve.

5. Conclusion

It wasn't until a couple of weeks into my internship that I began to feel uneasy. I wanted to believe in what I was doing, to say to the students: This has worth. This has meaning. This is real. I do care what happens in here. But how could I say that and still remain 'the' teacher?

I would like to say that this is when I realised that wearing the mask, acting as I thought a teacher should, was muffling my voice. I would like to say that this is when I realised the tension between wanting to care about my teaching, and wanting to remain at a distance, to not take it too personally. I would like to say that.

Thinking about this time, the following description of school culture helps me to understand my experience:

Classrooms are, for the most part, safe places, generally free from scrutiny, where teachers are free to live stories of practice. These lived stories are essentially secret ones. Furthermore, when these secret lived stories are told, they are, for the most part, told to other teachers in other secret places. When teachers move out of their classrooms... they often live and tell cover stories, stories in which they portray themselves as experts, certain characters whose teacher stories fit within the acceptable range of the story of school being lived in the school. Cover stories enable teachers whose teacher stories are marginalised by whatever the current story of school is to continue to practice and to sustain their teacher stories. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25)

I understand that as a teacher, there are certain stories of my practice that I tell to others, and certain stories that I keep to myself. My secret stories, I believe, are those stories that require me to question not only how I teach, but also who I am, and how I am like this. These are the stories that call into question my values, my beliefs, what I care about, and why I care. These are the stories that teach me who I am, and these are the stories that I've

attempted share here. But why should this process be difficult? Why should it feel a little like a confession, every time I write in the first person?

Perhaps, as Elliot and Hatton (1998) claim: "Public education... is subject to the requirement of neutrality, understood as tolerance" (p. 50). Perhaps the acceptable story of school is that of not taking things too personally. This is perhaps a story that assumes that teachers will remain neutral – they will not care too much, give too much, or question themselves too deeply. My cover stories, then, are those stories I tell to survive professionally, and protect myself personally. These are the stories that deny or refuse emotional investment, commitment, or concern over myself as a teacher, and over my students as people. These are the stories of becoming 'the' teacher. After all, it's just a job. But why should these stories have such force? Why is it that I prefer to tell them? Is it just easier not to question or be questioned too much?

This discussion of secret stories and cover stories raises as many questions for me as it addresses. Who do I keep the secret stories from? Who do I tell the cover stories to? What if my secret stories are kept silent, not only from others, but also from myself? What happens when I tell the cover stories not only to others, but also to myself? What happens if I begin to believe that these stories are true?

◆◆◆

I've been lucky. If I'd been given direction and told that I had to teach in a certain way or whatever that would have been difficult for me, but it hasn't happened.

I'm very lucky, in that the subjects that I teach, drama and english, are very broad curriculum wise.

I was lucky in my first year, I was constantly getting positive feedback and constantly being told to try things.

I was lucky, to find a school like Northwood for my first school.

I'm very lucky. I landed in the right place.

◆◆◆

I do what I've got to do out of school,
as far as extra work, but then I'm just gone.

I'm not the teacher any more. I'm just myself again.

I have to be comfortable with what
I'm doing in the classroom, because it's so much me in there,
it's not just the teacher.

As a teacher, I'm a lot of things that
I'm not in my own personal life.

I enjoy my job, but that's my job.
The rest of my life is the rest of my life.

I put a lot of myself
into myself as a teacher.

◆◆◆

It's the social thing.

It's being able to
help

kids
like
me

that made me
want to do it.

*I mean growing up my mum had me
when she was 17 years old, and, and
all that sort of crap, and*

being able
to be someone
that

isn't going to do that –
is going to make something
better,
and be self-sufficient, and
actually do
what they wanted
to do –
what they set out
to do

was a big motivation in my life.

That's where I'm coming from
with kids too –
no matter what sort of
stuff they've got
going on,
I'll try to bring out their
potential.

That motivates me
more
than teaching them about
Shakespeare
or
Stanislavsky.

8.

Michael Green

I've really enjoyed this struggle, in an effort to express just exactly what I've experienced and how I feel. That's been good, and it's made me stop and think about the past, and the people that have been significant, and about decisions I've made and why I've chosen to do the things that I've done. That's a healthy thing, because reflection is the key to learning about yourself and your experiences, and making judgements for the future. (Michael, Interview 3, p. 15)

1. Introduction

The following introduction contains sections of Michael's initial stories, and sections from our first interview together.

I'm pretty sure that the events and experiences that shaped me as a drama teacher were from the performing opportunities that I got as a young person. If I remember back to my primary school years, and my high school years, those experiences of being a part of presentations and performing things, everything from musicals to recitals to competitions to school plays, were all really important as an opportunity for me to be able to express and to imagine myself, and to express ideas and really explore the notion of self other than ego. I could pretend to be someone else, in a legitimate environment. I was always doing that as a kid anyway, always making plays in my head or acting out characters or whatever at home, but doing it in the drama classroom or in private drama lessons legitimised my imagination, and gave me the opportunity to explore that imagination. I can remember that really helped to clarify my own sense of self and my own personality, because I was able to have a break from it, by being these other characters, in other worlds or contexts. I used to get enormous positive reinforcement from adults too, if I was performing something for my grandmother's friends or whoever. When I was doing those sorts of things I'd get reinforcement as a performer, and that

was really good for my self-esteem. I was always getting reinforced for being a show-off or for being a performer in some way, either at home or at school.

With maths and science and all those other ‘left hemisphere’ subjects, I was never stimulated, and I hated it all. I hated all the time we had to spend on being able to have a balanced portion of that, so we had to do all of the maths and I just dreaded it. But those experiences in the drama classroom were a real outlet and an opportunity for me, and they were the earliest opportunities I can remember.

The most important people to me were very significant professional, passionate people. The drama teachers that I’d had at high school and with private tuition, and then at college, had all been very significant and very supportive. They had been people who were involved and articulate and very professional in their approach to drama as a classroom activity. It wasn’t until I got to university that I discovered that theatre as an art form was much more than classroom drama and curriculum studies. At university, the focus was no longer on social interaction, group dynamics, or personal development. It was no longer on what I’d always loved, which was exploring, experimenting, practicing, and expressing myself in the classroom. Instead, the focus was on creating performing art. So it moved away from the self, to creating art and expressing in another way. It wasn’t just working with a team, it was actually divorcing myself from my own specific needs and working more towards the group goal.

When I was in my final year at university, our class group was approached by a lecturer in curriculum drama to say that Paterson College were coming to see a production. We were asked if any of us would like to take these students through the facilities. They would see the production, take the students through, introduce them to some of the cast, and that sort of thing. Everybody else in the room said: “No, I’m too busy,” or: “Oh I couldn’t be bothered.” I waited until everyone else had spoken, and then I said: “I’d love to do that,” so I did. I organised for the actors to be in separate rooms, and I colour coded the college students so that they were in separate teams, and

each went off with a particular character, or actor, and I paired these actors up with stage crew and designers, so that the students could go to makeup, they could go to costume, set construction, and all the areas backstage as well as being on the set after the production. The whole thing took about half an hour, and I was thanked, and that was the end of it as far as I thought, and I was quite pleased with that. But then, about three weeks later, I got a phone call from Paterson College to say that there was one theatre production class available, to take through from Easter time until the end of the year, and would I be interested?

Having negotiated with the university over specific times when I could go down to the college and teach, I went down there. I worked really hard, not only with the current theatre production students, teaching them lighting, sound, and set, but also helping in a technical capacity with the end of year examinations, reorganising spaces and so on. They kept that one line of teaching open for me in the next year, which was my first year as a fully qualified teacher. As the first couple of school days for the year passed, the classes grew and I became full time.

I stayed at Paterson College for ten and a half years, and it was a fantastic place to work, and a fantastic level to work at. It wasn't all smooth sailing though, it was very difficult during my first year of teaching. I had a lot of behaviour problems with older students, 17 and 18 year olds. They didn't want to be taught by a 22 year old, and they had real issues with somebody coming in and taking them for drama when the older, more experienced drama teachers were taking other students. There were lots of issues there, but I worked really hard both within and outside of the curriculum.

2. Valuable interests

There is a distinction between learning to teach and becoming a teacher. (Britzman, 1992, p.24)

How might I become a teacher? Or to look at it another way, if I didn't become a teacher when I walked out of my graduation ceremony, degree in hand, when did I actually feel as though I was a teacher? According to Britzman (1992), becoming a teacher is "the work of carving out one's own territory within pre-established borders, of desiring to be different while negotiating institutional mandates for conformity, and of constructing one's teaching voice" (p.24). Learning to teach, it seems to me now, is about learning to play the role of teacher. Becoming a teacher, on the other hand, is about dropping this role. In order to be a teacher, I found that I had to learn what being a teacher meant to me. This isn't, in my experience, an easy or temporary process. Britzman (1992) describes identity, and becoming a teacher, as "a struggle for voice amidst voices that are not our own" (p.32). While university taught me how to fit in professionally, it didn't teach me how to stand out – how to find my own voice in a conversation about what it means to teach that I began to listen to many years ago. More to the point, I didn't even expect to learn this.

Everyone, I assume, has an idea about what it means to be a teacher. After ten or twelve years of continuous exposure to others teaching, how could this not be the case? However, as Britzman (1992) writes: 'The glorification of first-hand experience non-problematically scripts teacher identity as synonymous with the teacher's role and function' (p.23). Being a teacher, I felt, must involve more than planning lessons and marking assignments. How then could I break through this web of observations that were threatening to trap me into 'being' in a certain way? For me, it involved a reassessment of what it meant to be a teacher. I had to find the value of teaching, both personally and professionally. How does what I do affect or enrich my life?

And which of these – personal value and professional value – might be more important in terms of coming to know myself as a teacher? What meanings might I draw from being a teacher?

◆◆◆

I don't want to be
part of a

factory

I want to be
part of
an
artistic
process.

◆◆◆

I'm doing something that I know to be real and honest and just.

◆◆◆

I began to notice really early on in my life, just how important aesthetic understanding is. I'm thinking about in performance mode, or even just a sharing situation. There were lots of physical theatre things, lots of performances, where I started to see how significant the spatial relationships between actors and also physical things onstage were to the experience, and to the meaning that was gained. The element of surprise, the symbolism that happened, putting things in certain places at certain levels, all those principles and elements that we teach kids now. Spatial relations, levels, physical proximity and the use of colour were significant, because they gave the audience an emotional reaction. The use of darkness and light of course was really significant, and I noticed from very early on, that things took on a completely different mood and atmosphere when we turned off the lights and had the few portafloods or whatever on. I developed that aesthetic understanding very early on, and I knew that it was a greater experience for your audience or for others, if you utilised and manipulated elements just like that. If you've got an important thing to say or an important presentation to do, then you've got to think about all those elements.

We use them all the time in our society as well. My grandparents were strict Catholics, and so I had to go to church quite often. The Catholic church has heaps of these rituals. I can remember thinking: *Wow, that's there in the middle, and that's at the side for a purpose, and that's over there for that*

purpose. The whole ritual and ceremony of the Catholic church would have been a very early influence. I can remember putting that together with the theatre and thinking: *It has to be like this, otherwise it won't have the ceremony or the urgency, or the gravity, that I want it to have.* I was very serious about it.

In everything I do, I'm always using aesthetics.



Whatever I do, it'll only work if I'm totally engaged in it, and if I feel as though I own it, and I've got control, and I can put my free time and thought into it, as well as my professional time.



During high school and college, I was working at Kmart. I worked there for about five years as a 'casual', and they often pressured me because they perceived me as somebody who could basically get on with anybody. I would be moved around, whereas some people could only work in certain sections. I worked in every single department, and that was really good but they also pressured me to leave school and to leave college and to go and become a trainee manager. I thought I could do really well at that, and they used to promise me the world, as they do with all of the other trainee managers. They would say to me: "You could work up and become a buyer, you could work up and become somebody significant in the Coles Myer enterprise in this region."

I thought: *Yeah, but...* Even though that was attractive to a certain extent, I knew that it just wasn't going to be something that would make me feel good about my time on the planet. I remember talking to others and thinking to myself that I had to do something valuable with my time. Sticking merchandise on shelves for other people to have a bit of a look at and buy, I really couldn't see the worth in that.

At the same time, my grandmother, who I had been very close to, died. I started to have mortality thoughts, and think: *Well, you're only here for a certain amount of time.* My grandmother was here for eighty odd years so it was a bit out of proportion, but I started to see that you've got to do something with your time that is valuable to you and valuable to others, and I knew that for me, retail wasn't going to be that.

I knew that although there were lots of teachers that I didn't like or admire, there were also lots of teachers that I really liked as people, and I really admired them as people. I knew that what they did in the day, however stressful or intense or energy draining, was still much more worthwhile and more enjoyable than the other end of my opportunity, and I was becoming really worried about falling into something that I didn't have any control over.

Other people, my drama teachers from school, really encouraged me to come out to the university here and do the ES&D¹ course. They said: "You would love it, and you'd fly through it." I did the course, and they were right – I loved it here much more than I had in high school or matric, because I was so immersed and so totally involved in everything we were doing.



I don't want to
waste
my precious time
on the planet
doing something that just
goes
into the ether.

That's really why I stuck at
teaching
in the first place
I stuck at university
because my other options
the other options

¹ The Bachelor of Education (English, Speech and Drama) course, which all teachers in this project undertook to train as teachers. The course no longer exists.

*that I see so many
of my friends doing, or*
that were open to me

were doing things like

*stacking shelves
and non-professional
activities*

and I think
I'd be
really
unhappy
if I was just doing a job
for
money.

♦ ♦ ♦

I wanted to shape my own destiny.

♦ ♦ ♦

In terms of my development as a professional drama teacher, Robert Evans was like a bolt of lightning. Robert was a performing arts lecturer, and a director, at university. I'd never met anybody quite so dedicated, so focused, and so passionate about the creation of art, and in particular the aesthetic elements of theatre, and the elements of interpretation. He really did open up a window for me, in terms of my aesthetic understanding of how all the elements of theatre go together – the acting, the production elements, and also all of the marketing and pre-show aspects. These were all really part of his passion and his manifesto, his design. This was where I really began shifting from the focus on the self, into the focus of being a practitioner in the arts. I'd never had hands-on experience before with lighting, and sound, and set construction and design, and that's when I started to become involved in those aspects and I became quite an expert very quickly. That was exciting, really exciting.

Even though Robert was a very demanding person, and at times extremely frustrating and annoying, we still created the work at the end of the day. That's when I began to realise that the processes involved in theatre as an art form and also in performance-related teaching, weren't so much about getting it right – they were about going through the process, going on the artistic journey. Outcomes might not necessarily be achieved as they were expected in the beginning, indeed they may be very different by the end, but as long as that process has an artistic integrity, then all aspects of the journey are relevant. That's when I started to shift my thinking from having to get things right, to making sure that they were honest, and true.

I think Robert Evans was the first person that I met who was like that. He didn't hide his passion, he didn't hide his sexuality, he didn't hide any other motivation. He had spent his life so involved in the notion that art and performance were for the soul, not just things to laugh at or be funny with. To watch and to be in the presence of such a truly passionate person was an inspiration, and ignited my flame in so many ways. What he asked of you was one hundred percent commitment, to whatever was happening. Physically, emotionally, psychologically, financially, it had to be one hundred percent. I really liked that, because I've always thought that if it's worth doing and it's your thing, then you throw yourself right into it. I guess I have always done that.



If I had to teach something that I didn't love or value myself, I think that would be a really difficult thing to do.



I once said to another teacher during a bad day at Paterson College: "Is this a good way to spend your life? Is this the right spiritual path to be on?"

She said to me: “Look, we turn up here every day for work, and we get to make and create and basically have lots of structured play. How many people go to work every day and really do that?”

I said: “Well, that’s very true.”

We do get to do that. Sometimes you need to separate that from all of the other things that make you feel stressed and pressured, and just get back to that feeling of structured, productive, creative play.



I’ve been working now as a practising drama teacher for 11 years, and they’ve been full time apart from last year. Before that, there were the four years of teacher education and theatre, and of course prior to that was my own formative schooling, and so there hasn’t been a break at all, of any considerable time, from this whole immersion in the arts and the practice of it. I think that’s been a wonderful thing, and I’m very proud of that, even though it wouldn’t be considered nowadays to be very worldly or well-rounded, to have gone through that process of secondary schooling, training, and then straight back into education. It’s very in-vogue to have the notion of going away and travelling, and having a bit of a break, and doing all those sorts of things.

Certainly at times I’ve felt a bit burnt out, by the whole process of giving, and teaching, and being able to work with other people on developing their skills. I’ve had a really good strategy of being able to feel as though I am artistically and emotionally fulfilled in myself, and that is doing other outside tasks like either acting in local performances, or being involved backstage, or some other sort of arts involvement. I think that’s sustained me, and fulfilled me to a certain extent.

I’m also very lucky to have worked at the senior secondary level, where I can actually work on an arts model, rather than always in a classroom or drama

curriculum model, so there has been those times where I've been able to look at students and say we're not working in social drama type activities. There's situations where you're creating art, and that's extremely fulfilling as well. Personally and artistically, I get just as much of a kick out of the end product as the students do, so that has really sustained me.



I said to the students only this year in the drama classroom: "I congratulate you on choosing this subject, because there are lots of impediments to choosing an arts-based subject. It doesn't appear to have immediate vocational benefit. It doesn't appear to lead you to a particularly high score, or an inflated mark for the end of the year. It doesn't give you as much credibility amongst peers, or parents, as some others areas of the curriculum, really good subjects like accounting, which will help you get rich."

Through the filter of all those impediments, it still seems to come through that the kids don't just do it because it's fun. At this level they can articulate that it also helps you with your confidence, it helps you to be able to express yourself, to communicate with others, and they seem to understand –

that
the
essence
of
happiness
is not necessarily
just
money.

It's not just
how much you get
and it's not about
the stuff
that you'll be able to buy
with all that money.

They understand
that there is another motivation
for learning

for growing
for creating
and doing things like drama.

It's that you might actually
learn more
about yourself,
and improve your skills,
and become
a
richer
adult
in
other
ways.



I'll talk about a very significant event and Tim you probably already know most of this, but to have it on record for you, I think this is my most famous event as a drama teacher.

It was 1991 or 1992, when the Gulf War was at its heights. The students had decided, after much workshopping, that this was a significant issue that they wanted to explore. We were working on war as a concept, and in particular the futility of war and the notion of how innocence is always engulfed by war – between policies, or between countries, with civil war, or invasion, or whatever. Our major focus became how innocents and civilians are always at risk.

There were a few students in the class who were part of the army reserve, about three of them. As part of this activity, they approached me and said that they had an idea of having a raid in the classroom, while the class was doing something in relation to war. They would storm in, them and their three friends, with replica guns, balaclavas, and to all intents and purposes hijack, or take hostage, the lesson and the people in it. They would make us all lie on the floor, and intimidate us to a certain extent, and then leave, and then we would reflect on what that experience was like, and use it if possible, or just gain from it some sort of understanding about what it must be like to be going

about your daily life in civilian activity, and have somebody else's war, or somebody else's hostility, coming in to your environment, your home, and your workplace.

I agreed to this, and talked to them at length about what exactly was going to happen and had assurances from them, and they were true to their word. They did exactly what they said they were going to do. They came in through the ceiling, through the doors, through the windows, and intimidated people in order to get them on the floor. As they came through, every student in that room looked to me, for support or for some sort of understanding. I pretended to be just as stunned and shocked as they were, and told everybody to follow the commands, which is exactly what they did. They got on the floor, and it proceeded for about three minutes, while we were intimidated and told what was going to happen, and why it was happening, and what we needed to do, and there were threats and there were loud noises, there was no gunfire or anything like that, but there was shouting and there was a bit of a speech about why they were there. At the same time, completely by coincidence, an ambulance or a police siren went down the street outside the drama room. The students, who didn't know anything about it, thought it was in reaction to what they were experiencing, which was a pretty major thing.

When the hijackers left, I got up and told people to relax and talk about it, and then the students came back in, without their uniforms on, without the khaki camouflage gear. There were some students, about three or four in a class of twenty-five, who were very traumatised by the situation, and for good reason as I found out later. Some of them had experienced very traumatic and very violent events, in other countries or in their domestic life here, and they were badly affected. Some were shocked, some were a bit annoyed, some were upset, and some were almost hysterical, and left the room. Of course, there were repercussions from this activity.

♦ ♦ ♦

You can't always learn

from vicarious opportunities or
from others.

You can't always get it
from the textbook.

You can't always get it
from somebody else
telling you
what history was like
or why trigonometry is important.

But in our area
in the arts
experience
is a really important part
of how the students learn
and how they can
interpret
and create art
and drama
from the experience.

We need to have
first
hand
opportunities
not vicarious ones.

For drama
we must live it
and feel it
and own it.

3. Belonging

*What structures our capacity to "name" ourselves, to "speak"
ourselves, to make a "self" in the midst of the collision of shifting
identities and movement across different contexts? What
inherited meanings do we draw on? And how do we make sense
when inherited meanings break down? (Lather & Smithies, 1997,
p. 124)*

*I become
a teacher
by the value*

*of what I do
both to
myself*

*and
others.*

*I name
myself
in part
by the meaning of
my work
and its value*

*to
others.*

*So
what happens
to me
when my work is not valued?*

*What if I
believe,*

*but
others*

*do
not
?*

◆◆◆

At Paterson College when I started we were teaching in an old science room. Visual artists aren't expected to teach in the maths classroom, and music teachers get purpose-built practice rooms that have 'block outs' and so on, but the drama teacher, well you can have the old science room and teach in there. But then the new library was finished, and so the previous library space suddenly became available. The principal rang Michelle Phillips, the senior drama teacher, at about seven o'clock one night and said: "If you want that space for drama, you'd better get in there tomorrow, and you'd better put your claim on it, because there's lots of people who have said that they want to move Child Studies, or P.E. or whatever in there. There are about four or five different groups interested in it."

Michelle was so geared up that she rang me straight away, and we went down that night. We were there until after midnight, moving all of our stuff down to

that room. We just stacked it all right up at the door, so we were literally creating a barricade. It was siege mentality, and a way of saying: *We've got ownership. We're moving in, the principal said so, here's all our stuff, so go away.* It became very much like that.

That was the very first night that I felt as though we were going to build something really significant there.



From there we really grew, the department grew threefold, and we started doing big productions that were in the hall and then at the local theatre, because we were able to build upon the notion that we had an identity. We had a physical space and an identity as a team of people, as opposed to one or two people working in isolation. We had a faculty mentality and the office space to go with it.

Although it was old and run-down and was the 'third world' compared to all the new buildings, we created a sense of homeliness by creating a lounge area and putting in a stereo, which worked for a few years until it became unwieldy. We had a common room feeling where we could build a sense of arts community for the kids, with us and them, and it was a sense of family. I don't want to sound corny, but we really did that. That was really significant for me, because I'd really found a job.



Michelle Phillips was very significant in my development as a teacher. All of the skills that I took from Michelle weren't necessarily curriculum-based, but were generic skills. They were skills that helped me become organised, that helped me understand and develop a notion of what pastoral care is for students, that helped me understand what is appropriate to say, and how to deal with difficult situations. I observed her very closely, particularly in my beginning years, because I really admired the way that she was respected by

her peers, and how she gained a great sense of self-worth and purpose through the work that she was involved in.

Michelle was involved in everything and nothing was too much trouble. She would be involved in lots of things within and outside the curriculum area. Across the school, she was a significant player and a significant team member in all sorts of things, and that's what made her popular, well-liked, and considered to be a consummate professional.

What was really nice about our professional relationship though, was that she also listened to me, and made me feel as though I had just as much to offer the department, and the school, and her. She would openly say in front of myself and others: "You've got those skills, I really envy those skills that you have in the production area." I really admired that level-headed and not so selfish response, for the good of others and the good of the kids. She was an operator of the highest degree and I enjoyed working with her for seven years, and she was very significant in my development.

◆◆◆

Several years ago there came my way an opportunity, if I wanted it, to be involved in a teacher exchange with a north London school. I started corresponding with another drama teacher there, Jill, who wanted to come to Australia, who wanted to have senior drama experience, and hadn't had a lot. I had wanted to go to London for a long time, to be more than a tourist, to actually work there, and it just seemed that this opportunity was going to be a good one. We planned for a teacher exchange, which happened last year. I went from Paterson College, which was very organised, a supportive environment, with great facilities and a lot of money, to her school in north London, which was very poor in resources, very poor in facilities, without a lot of support and without a lot of positive experiences.

◆◆◆

I have to
look at that whole London experience
in a
positive sense –

as an
adventure

- not

a
minor
mental
breakdown.

♦ ♦ ♦

I was shocked about the inner-city conditions of that school in London. There was no grass, no trees. There's a huge refugee population in that part of London, it's where they get dropped off at those giant housing estates, so their children all came in to the school as students. It was a school of 2000 students from 7 to year 12. I was teaching drama across the range there –

I had
six grade 7 classes
five grade 8 classes
four grade 9 classes
two grade 10 classes
a grade 11
and a grade 12 class each week.

They were six period days
and I was teaching up to
six periods every day.

There were supposed to be
three
or four
free periods a week
of 45 minutes each
but you could have up to
three cover periods a week,
when somebody was away
and you were expected to
cover the maths class
cover the French class
or what have you,

so you could rely on
one free period a week
in which
you got to prepare
and do anything you wanted.

That was quite a shock to the system.



The classes in London had really prescriptive course outlines, and highly prescriptive units of work that were very detailed, heavily detailed. They were a recipe-based approach. They'd been written by staff there some time ago and they were tried, true, and tested, and rewritten and therefore deemed perfect if you like for their context. I guess they were. I found them very restrictive, and because I hadn't written them or had any input into the writing of them, I also found it difficult to decode them.

I was often queried on why, for example, I'd do things in pairs that the plan said should be done in small groups. When the head of drama used to walk through to her office, which was through my classroom, she would notice that I was doing a particular class in this format rather than in another way, and she would query that because she thought that was going to give me an extra pressure and stress that I didn't need. What I was doing was interpreting the objectives, and making my own judgements, and she found that difficult. So then I said: "If you want me to copy the lesson, I need to see it done in this particular way because I don't understand it."

She said: "Well, that would be a really good idea but we're all on at the same time, and that's unfortunate because there isn't any time, and if we put all of the students together it will be too big."

I felt really unsupported in that way. That's so alien to what we understand a professional judgement to be about in this country, but she meant that it would be best for me if I just followed the script and stopped making other decisions, because that would be a lot harder in the long run. That was her point, and

she actually said at one time: “It’s like you’re beginning teaching all over again really, isn’t it?” I thought that was a really narrow-minded comment, because there were lots of other things that I was bringing to the experience, and we could have had a real sharing.

◆◆◆

There was a thing called ‘pounding’, which is just part of the school culture there now, where one student is pushed up against a wall and about ten others pound the chest of that boy or girl, all in the same rhythm. They would try to make the heart stop, and apparently the urban myth was that years ago, a boy had been killed by this pounding, where his heart had skipped a beat and actually stopped and they couldn’t revive him. That was considered quite cool then, and a part of this urban myth was that if you didn’t like somebody, well just give him a pounding. Death was seen as something to just experiment with, just to see if they could do it, if they could inflict it.

◆◆◆

I’ve always gained enormous satisfaction out of being able to help and support and ‘do’, for others. It’s just part of why I like living in a smaller community, because you can do things not just for the self, but for others. I don’t know why, but I get enormous satisfaction from thinking of myself as significant to other people.

◆◆◆

I felt as though
I had to just
mimic.

That really
frustrated me –

because I didn’t know
how to do that.

To be able to turn around

and go:

*Don't think
just do it
don't try
and be clever
don't try
and make it something
beyond that*

*just do it
like
this*

*just
be
this*

was
really hard.

When I struggled
and found

*Well
that's just
what we do*

I didn't want to be a part of it any more.

◆◆◆

I saw some boys stomp on a squirrel in the playground, and kill it, and then kick it around the playground like a ball. This happened in moments. I immediately interceded there and got really upset, and started berating them.

I told the year 10 supervisor that I knew one of the boys, because he was in my class. I asked this teacher if that behaviour would be followed up, and to my knowledge nothing was ever done or followed up. That made me feel like I didn't really know what was appropriate then, because I understood that if that happened in Australia, I'd like to think anyway, that there would be some follow-up. To my knowledge nothing was ever followed up about that incident, and I felt therefore that I didn't know what was appropriate. I really

felt disempowered, on that level, that I wasn't a part of how that was going to be resolved.



The turning point came one day, after I had been at the school for a while. I went to Bill, the grade 8 supervisor, about a situation for the third time. I said: "Look, I've received a fake note here, these two girls were twenty minutes late to my class, and they had a note, and it was a forged note, and it had a teacher's signature on it." It was perfect, because these girls had been a problem for a while, and parent teacher night was coming up. So I said to Bill: "What would you like me to do with this forged note? Do you want to keep it and show the parents, or do you want to give it to the form tutor?"

He'd had enough, and he said to me:

*"Look
what you need to do
son
is do what I do.
You come to work in the morning
you take
your fucking pills
and you just say
fuck it
fuck it
fuck it
all
day
long."*

With that he turned and walked away.

That's when I started to close down and not follow procedures. That's when I began to feel as though I was on my own. I only lasted a term and a half all up. I was there six and a half months, and I will say that even though I couldn't sustain the experience, I did learn an enormous amount about myself as a teacher during that time.



I think London helped me develop my survival skills a great deal. Coming back after that, and then making a break from Paterson College and out of that enormous comfort zone, meant that I had to really adjust to the change that a new school brings, and the change of position and structure within a hierarchy of a school. I had to kick back and think: *I'm not always going to be in control, and I've got to learn to accept that. Not always getting it right doesn't mean that I'm a bad teacher or a bad person*, so it was as fundamental as that. That's a survival skill, because it helps me to understand that I don't have to be perfect to do my job.

That's relevant, because it will stop me from burning out, and it will ensure that if things go wrong, I won't leave the job in a mad hurry and burst of flames. Also, if something happens unexpectedly, like being moved into another environment where I'm feeling the same sort of thing, I'll be able to reflect on it, and say: *Well that's how I saw it, and this is how I was able to work through that particular issue*. So having that extreme experience has made me feel as though next time – when hopefully it won't be as extreme – I'll be able to cope much better emotionally and pedagogically. That was a major experience, and I think that next time, it might not be as traumatic.



When I came back
early
from London
I didn't
have
a
school to go to. I put myself on the relief teacher register², and strangely enough the first school that I went to visit was Southlands College, because I have friends who work there. They suggested that I go and see the Assistant Principal there, and so that's what I did, and I had work the very next day.

² A directory of relief (or 'supply') teachers, who are available to supervise classes in the absence of regular class teachers. In Tasmania, there are relief teacher registers held centrally in each of the five school districts.

It's quite an interesting thing to be a relief teacher, because there aren't that many relief teachers, and it's quite a difficult thing to go and do.

They saw that I was a relief teacher who would actually teach the class, rather than just mind the class. It's quite a good hourly rate of pay, so I felt obliged to actually engage in the syllabus, and take the students on to the next phase. I was almost employed full-time just doing that, and then there were small part-time jobs, one class here, one class there, and I picked up half a load. I became entrenched there, and eventually they asked me if I would consider staying next year, and I was quite flattered and I agreed.

♦ ♦ ♦

Validating my position, and feeling as though I belong, come with the enormous amount of investment that I put into it, so that I can feel as though I'm needed, I'm secure, and that I'm also stretching the boundaries and creating something that's important and memorable.

♦ ♦ ♦

I've really gone in hard at a new school this year. I've been welcomed, and I've been able to fit in with the staff climate. People enjoy working at Southlands, lots of people say it's the best school you can get to teach at. The staff are all really happy about working there –they feel a part of the decision making process, they get on well with the kids, and they really enjoy their day because they are employed to teach subjects in areas that they really are passionate about. There's a real sense of ownership, and input, and control.

I feel as though I've got a lot to offer the school. I can do things outside my immediate curriculum area, and I can become involved in lots of other things as well. For example, I've been the MC at the three assemblies that have happened this week, and in so doing have stepped into what is apparently a very auspicious role. I've managed to become very high profile through introducing myself to the students, and introducing other members of staff and

linking together items in the assembly, so that I have quickly become part of the team.

Other staff who are new to the place are still struggling with feelings of acceptance and feeling that they belong and all those sorts of things that really worry them. But they don't have that sense of becoming involved and interested in other programs outside their immediate area, that I bring to my work. I see that as an investment, and that goes back to the earlier discussions that we had, about investing in the passionate things that you want to do. I guess in order to make sure that I get to sustain myself in that school, and sustain what I'd like to be, that investment is really important to me, and that's one thing that comes through. To other people that seems an extraordinary level of commitment, but to me that just comes as a natural part of doing the job, because I enjoy it, rather than feeling as though it's work.

♦ ♦ ♦

I like to feel
as though
my skills
and abilities
are important
and unique
and valued,
and that I'm seen
as somebody who
does take
an interest
and who cares.

I think
a lot of people
are like that

but

I don't think
we articulate that
very often
and very fully
to ourselves.

4. Forming connections

I remember
my feelings
being very
vivid

when I was the age of these
students.

I can still remember
the *anxiety*
and the *pressure*
and the *stress*
and the *expectation*
and just being *overwhelmed*
with
so
many

 variables

that now as an
adult, you
just don't even worry about.

I try to
remember
that, and
hang on
to that, and
see
it
through
their
eyes.

◆◆◆

One person that I should mention is somebody I worked with for six years – Karen Fraser. I learnt a lot of things in spite of Karen. She was very capable as a drama teacher, but not at all a team player. Still, she was a leader and a significant person to me, because although she had many ideas and strategies that were quite valid and that I appreciated, I never felt comfortable with her as a professional. When she would come and see my work, her body language would look as though she did not approve, and in fact her feedback to me about the work that I'd done with students was often negative, and

without being personal, she would discuss what she thought the process had been, and what would obviously have been the problems with that. I was a third year out teacher, and she would often make me feel as though what I was doing with the students wasn't very worthy.

I began to not really enjoy working with her, because I never felt comfortable with her, or as though I could trust her with a lot of things that I wanted to ask, because I felt as though I would be seen as incapable. I also shied away from her because I didn't believe that a lot of the personal issues that she brought into the classroom were very relevant or very appropriate. She was a person who liked to be very open about her own life outside of school, and her own sexuality and sexual experience. She was quite open and frank about those sorts of discussions, while at 22 I was still struggling with the notion of my own personal identity and in particular sexuality. I found it difficult to be able to communicate with her about those sorts of issues. I knew that I wasn't heterosexual, which she was passionately concerned with, and I felt as though her private and personal life conflicted a lot with her professional life. I think that was significant to me because it made me realise that that there's a lot that you can bring personally to the job, but when you're dealing with young people, I think there's a lot that you need to keep to yourself. Even though they are 16, 17, or 18 year olds at this particular grade level, they are still babies, and I don't mean that in a patronising way. I mean that they are still emotionally and psychologically very immature, and their experimental phase is in full swing, and I think teachers and their views and their opinions are very significant to the way that young people perceive and observe themselves. There is a lot that that teachers have to keep to themselves, because it's not an open slather.



I think that where I found a sense of identity, and where I felt a sense of fun and excitement, was in the performance area. See, I've never had the joys of being in the football team and winning the grand final, so I don't know about that, but I can imagine I'm a bit like the sports teacher who just loved sport as

a kid. I know that the sense of excitement, worth, fun, and imagination that performing and working with theatre gave me is the root of where I come from in my teaching. I try to invigorate kids into that, because I know that it's a worthwhile pastime, and form of expression. To be able to find a way of performing and expressing and presenting is really a wonderful gift to be able to give somebody, and it's a wonderful thing to keep developing in yourself.

♦ ♦ ♦

The biggest learning curve that I've had while teaching is to understand that you've got to be generous of yourself and your own spirit, before the students will be.

♦ ♦ ♦

I always try to empathise as much as possible with what the students are going through and where they're at, because I can remember at that time just how significant insignificant things were, and how hypersensitive I was to what the teacher had to say. It's true, the 17 and 18 year olds that I teach at the moment appear to have a tough exterior, but they're babies as much as the younger ones are, emotionally and psychologically. They're starting to operate in an adult world but gosh, they need all the reinforcement and encouragement and positive feedback they can get. It's really important to see beyond yourself, and that no matter what sort of stresses or anxieties or pressures that you have on you at that particular time, it only takes a minute to make the difference in somebody else's day, or in how they perceive themselves.

♦ ♦ ♦

I think I teach
very much from my
personality.

I try to have
a relationship

with the kids first
and then
I try to
teach them.

I try to have
a relationship
I try to have
some sort of
connection
with them.

I think that's
always
been
my
style.

You've got to be
really engaged
and it's a
draining
style.

♦ ♦ ♦

At Southlands College now, we're participating in a lot of programs that I did when I was the age of the students, such as competitions, eisteddfods, and college musicals. It's made me remember how my own aesthetic development happened and started, and it's made me reflect on whether these are actually worthwhile experiences for the students. So I've had to go back and think about what that was like for me, and wonder whether that's something I impose on the students from that time. Is this just me going through a sentimental phase and imposing that on them? Are these actually appropriate arts experiences?

♦ ♦ ♦

I remember what it was like.
I empathise with the students.

This is a really
precious

and really
stressful
period in your life.

We're
lucky
that they're here.

I try and keep a
hold of that even though they're
one
of thirty,

they're special to people at home
as precious
precious
things
and I'm entrusted
to spend the next two hours of their time with them
and it's quite
humbling
really, it's quite an
amazing
thing to do.

That's an enormous
responsibility
if you analyse it.

It's not just
a job
it really is
a very powerful
and important
position.

I try to
keep that
uppermost
in my mind
when I'm deciding
whether or not
to
care.

5. Conclusion

Learning to teach may be a process of learning how to act. Learning to be a teacher, however, has been for me (and perhaps Michael) a process of learning how to invest. While I can be told or taught how to act, can anyone tell or teach me how to invest? Can anyone teach me how much to invest?



I have to feel as though my work is just as important as my family, or my home. It has to be an equal part of it. I think that teachers have to decide what percentage, or what degree of importance they place on their work.

Is it a part of your life?

If so, on what level?

There are so many layers to that, and we're all expected to do a multifaceted, and multi-roled job, and

often you
don't know where
you
finish
as a teacher,

and where
you
start
as a person.

I think every teacher, whether it's conscious or not, makes a decision of just how much their work is them, and how much their other sporting commitments, or other cultural or community commitments are them.

Is it an equal share?

Or is it more weighted to one than the other?

Or is work just a place where you go to earn the money?

I think everybody makes those decisions consciously, but then it all becomes an area of grey, and not nearly as well-defined as they'd like.

I need to know that my work is really important. I need to feel as though I'm valued, and that without me, things wouldn't go as well as they do. I know that to be true, because people have said to me: "This can go ahead because we trust you, and you'll make it happen and it will be done correctly." But everybody's different, and sometimes I try to check myself by saying:

Am I just doing too much?

Should I just have some time for me?

Do I need to opt out?

I don't know now how much of the job is me, and how much of me is the job. I think I'm on the right spiritual path, so to speak.

9.

Emily Reade

This process has actually made me reflect on my practice and made me reflect on what I do and why I do it, which has been an interesting thing, because I don't think we as teachers do that nearly enough. I think we tend to be so busy doing, that we don't stop to think, and in stopping to think, that makes you see so much more about yourself. It also makes you see so much more about the hows and the whys and that's so important. It gives you a clearer view of where you can go, because you know where you've been. (Emily, Interview 3, p. 10)

1. Introduction

Before beginning the interview process, Emily wrote three stories. I reprint them here:

Story 1: Losing Westfield High.

When I first arrived at Westfield (my second school after graduating), I was told by the kids that I didn't use enough perfume to be a Drama teacher- apparently, the perfume cloud was supposed to act as an early warning system! The teacher I was replacing had been much loved, and the comparisons were inevitable.

The staff's comments were that I was too quiet to be a drama teacher – the old stereotype that Drama teachers have to be loud and outrageous, constantly seeking the spotlight. That has never been me. I was much happier putting someone else in the spotlight.

I was the youngest staff member, and most of the male staff had taught with my stepfather in their younger days. The staff were very supportive, and I felt

that my ideas and input were welcomed and encouraged. As a result, over the two years, my confidence as a teacher really developed.

At Westfield there was an assembly once every term, and there was always pressure from the AST 3 in charge – Jen – to provide something. She was the previous Drama teacher's best friend; she was loud, excitable, and at times quite intimidating. At first, I did what was expected, and dutifully prepared things for assembly. But I felt like I was just doing scripts, the kids were bored, so was I, and it just seemed to be theatre for cheap laughs. Nothing that would make anybody think or consider. So I bit the bullet and told Jen that we would be performing, but in the theatre, not in assembly. The work that the kids were doing needed to be performed in that space, with limited audience.

I started working with the kids on a show called *Trust*. It had come about from me taking the kids to see a youth theatre group's show, and the conversations that had taken place afterwards. I'd asked the kids what it was they wanted, for themselves, and from the adults around them. The answer ended up being a chant that they started the show with: Freedom (from fear, to be themselves, to love), Trust (from their parents, from each other) and Self Respect. I asked the kids to be really clear about who this show was aimed at. They wanted it to be for year 9 and 10, and their teachers, and so over three shows, this was the audience.

Jen brought her French class, and afterwards she came up to me and said that now she understood what it was I was on about. I didn't have to worry about skits for assembly again. Jen became a real supporter of Drama.

Losing Westfield High was devastating. It was so hard because it was nothing I'd done or not done, it was just that three others had come back from leave. My initial response to Westfield had been disappointment; I'd wanted to go to Launceston. I spent my second year there driving an hour and a half each way, living in Launceston, and loving Westfield High and wishing I could move it and the whole town an hour further down the highway. I was 24, in a

good relationship, we had our first home, and everything was really exciting. Everything was perfect. And then I lost my job.

Suddenly, I'd gone from having an income, and respect for what I did, to being unemployed, and trying desperately to make the last pay cheque last. It got to January before I finally got to speak to Robert Johnston, the district superintendent, and at last, he said he had a job for me – at Frankland High School, teaching Dance and Drama.



Story 2: Frankland High.

I arrived at Frankland High ready to kick start the Dance program, as I'd been told by Robert Johnston, and to teach Drama. I felt like my success at Westfield *had* been recognised by somebody. It wasn't to be quite that easy.

The staff at Frankland High were a lot older, or at least they seemed that way. I didn't feel at all comfortable, because of the looks of complete disdain from other staff members, and the comments they made, like: "Oh, you've been to other schools have you? On practice rounds I expect."

I was actually really homesick for Westfield, and when Jen sent photos from the school magazine of my homeroom, and my drama kids, I really wanted to cry. I ended up volunteering to go on two year 7 camps just to get out of the place! Even then, as I was leaving, having already left my relief instructions both on my desk and with a vice principal, I had my new colleague sidle up to me and say: "Brett was complaining about your lack of organization, not having those texts ready, but don't worry, I set him straight." This was said with the most insincere smile I have ever seen. Paranoia was a favourite game.

The biggest change to get used to was that now I was working in a Department, not on my own. And personality always seems to play such a

large part in Drama teaching. The other members of the department had been in the same year at uni, and there was a strong sense of competition between the two of them. They both seemed to believe that good discipline meant kids were scared of you, but you had to be really popular with them too. I'd watch them blast kids for not having a shirt tucked in, or having a hat on, or not standing straight enough in line, or talking in class (yes, even in Drama!) – it was just so humiliating. We had to do a lot of team teaching; this meant that we mostly did exactly the same kinds of work. I still had a Grade seven by myself, and a combined Grade 9/10 because those classes clashed with Dance, which my colleague was now taking. And with those classes, I had a ball.

I was also really lucky to have two staff members who took me under their wings and were wonderful supports. Simon invited me to work on a visual text project with him, and that gave me a great sense of accomplishment, and I had some amazing classes as a result of the work we were doing. I also had Andrew, my Merlin. Looking like an extra from the Grateful Dead, only tidied up and wearing a suit, Andrew was my protection from the mind games and the paranoia. We shared a staff room, so he was aware of the tensions, and we did Duty together, so he was able to give useful strategy tips as we strolled around the oval. Tips like dress to protect yourself, in short, dress up, claim status that way. This was so sweet coming from an old Hippie like Andrew! So I invested in a few dressy jackets and started to visualise them as armour in the mornings when I put them on.

And then I finally got my permanency! And it was at Paterson College! I actually heard one staff member bitching (and that is the only term that describes her tone) that I had P.C. When I smiled sweetly and said hello, making it obvious that I'd heard, this fine AST 3 snubbed me.

Leaving was really interesting. My last couple of days I would walk into my office after class and Duty with armfuls of cards, chocolates, and flowers. My colleague kept telling me that her cards, from kids she'd taught last year, were arriving at home. And then there was the last day, and the inevitable present from the staff. I was given a 'Ladybird' book, because my colleague had told

the Home Economics teacher buying the presents that I was into kids' books. I have never left a place so quickly and with absolutely no regret. I went to the pool and swam for two hours, laps, just to wash it all away.



Story 3: Paterson College.

When I started at P.C. in 1996 it was with a sense of relief. It was a friendly, supportive place to work. Michelle Phillips, the most senior drama teacher, was a great mentor and role model, and Michael, the other drama teacher, was great to work with. I suppose what made it so different was that there was such a clear sense of my place within this team. I was the junior, I was the youngest, and had been teaching for the shortest time. While Michael was only two years my senior, he had always taught at the College, and that carried a certain prestige. So for the first two years I was very much learning the ropes, and I think that everyone, myself included, expected that I would go off and have kids, and that while I enjoyed what I did and was okay at it, my future lay elsewhere. It was even a bit of a joke, that I was so keen to get married and have a baby. What nobody knew was that at Christmas '96 I'd had a very early miscarriage. One temporary staff member even said to me the following February: "I wish you permanents would just go and get pregnant so we could have your jobs!" Well, I was trying!

At the end of '97 everything changed again. We had a new principal, and the college was split into three 'schools'. I was asked to take on a Program Manager's role. This had the responsibility and line release time of an AST 3, without the pay. Michelle was taking on a Deputy Head of School role, and as you can imagine, this seriously upset the status quo. For me, it meant an acknowledgement of my skills. I was actually a very good administrator, I was a good organiser, and I may even have been a good leader. I found myself actually making plans, career plans. I had been very active in TADIE¹

¹ The Tasmanian Association for Drama in Education, now known as Drama Tasmania.

as it was then, and had been on the executive committee for two years, making strong links with professional companies, hosting visiting speakers for conferences, and organising PD for other drama teachers. The irony was that I was now in a groove with my career, and things were happening for me, but for my partner Dave, things were on a down turn. It was such a subtle pressure even I wasn't aware of it at the time.

Then Michelle left P.C. This was a huge shock, and again, everything changed! I now took over the main Production Manager role on *Godspell*, which was the school production that year. I also took on the new role as Program Manager, organised a TADIE conference, and had a battle royal with the Special Ed teacher over inappropriate placement of students. I was run off my feet, stressed, and four weeks into term had a second early miscarriage, that again, no one knew about. By April and the weekend of the TADIE conference, my relationship was in deep, deep trouble. By closing night of *Godspell*, it was over. I was stuck in this weird situation where professionally I was on one of the absolute highs of my career, yet personally I was at one of my lowest points ever.

I coped by hanging on to my career for all it was worth. Being good at what I did was now more important than ever, because this was all I had left of my identity. At the end of '98 I was asked to continue with a new Program Management role, which was running a back to education program for teenage mothers. I turned it down, and stuck very much to Drama teaching. I also got my AST 1 position.

Stanislavski's theory that actors should be 'perfect' human beings actually applies far more to Drama teachers. When our lives are falling apart our job still requires us to deal with emotions, to explore situations we'd much rather hide from, and all the while we look out for our students, making sure that they are comfortable with the emotional content we are dealing with. We are often not that careful with ourselves.

2. Foundations

Early in the project, when I realised it would be necessary to undertake a pilot study, my first thoughts were to trial the methods on myself. After all, what better way to explore how it might feel for the participants to go through this process, than to feel it myself? I sat down, looked at the questions and instructions, and thought about where to go from here, how I would structure my experiences into a timeline. How would I tell of myself as a teacher?

An hour or so later, still looking over the questions with no answers coming to mind, I realised this wouldn't work. It wasn't a problem with the methods, it seemed, rather it was a problem with how I saw myself. Putting aside the blank sheet of paper, I instead picked up my journal, and wrote the following:

I am a margin-walker, unwilling or unable to place my feet firmly within the borders of any one region on the professional landscape. I am not "finished"; my meaning is not fixed – who I am and how I perceive my identities is the sum of many different parts. I see myself in a number of different ways – sometimes drama teacher, sometimes student, sometimes researcher, sometimes teacher educator – and yet none of these professional identities seem complete or well developed. Is this lack of experience? But when would I become a "drama teacher", or a "teacher educator"? Would it be when it is easier or more desirable to identify with this group than any other? And in the midst of all these parts, where am I? How am I more than a collection of disparate parts? All of these identities must build upon something. Where are my foundations, and how are *they* built?

◆◆◆

I think one of the really important things I've come to realise in the last three years is that our professional identity is not completely separate from our personal identity. If you had asked me five years ago where would I be

in five years, it wouldn't be where I am now. It would be where all but one of my fellow class of '88 mates are – at home with the kids.

♦ ♦ ♦

In July:
 I left Dave
 I bought a house
 I renovated a house
 I marked writers' workshop
 I started working on two productions
 I got my kids through the practical exams.

I'd gone:
 right
 let's make ourselves as busy as humanly possible
 let's overachieve
 and I was doing only professional activities.

It was like:
 You haven't got a personal side to your life any more,
 let's just put all the focus on your professional life.

♦ ♦ ♦

One of my favourite things
 with grade 7s when I first started
 was to tell stories
 about scars on your body
 and how you got the scar.

I used to tell a story
 about walking along a smooth wooden bridge
 running my feet along it
 and suddenly finding that it wasn't so smooth
 after all
 because I was stuck to it by the foot.

I can tell that story because it's just
 a scar on my body
 it's not
 a
 scar
 on
 me.

♦ ♦ ♦

At Paterson College,
when we had
three suicides
in 18 months
that was just devastating
in so many ways.

You felt like you had just failed
and you hadn't failed as a teacher
you'd failed as a human being
and it was
horrific.

It was just soul-destroying
you felt so helpless.

What we were feeling was probably
a grain of sand on a beach
compared to what parents and family
must have been feeling
but you just felt so useless.

It wasn't that you'd failed
to teach these kids
it was that you'd failed
to keep them alive
and that was a huge difference.

◆◆◆

I was there. When Dennis died. I wonder if Emily remembers.

On my teaching internship, at Paterson College. I remember walking in that morning, along the tiled corridor, black and white checkerboard. Glass windows along one side, looking in to the staff office, nestled in a corner of the main performance area. My footsteps echoed around me, accentuated by the glass and tiles, and I remember thinking how much I sounded like a teacher, in my teacher shoes bought for the occasion. I looked through the windows – was anyone there yet? Or would I have to wait for someone with a key to show up? The air was fresh, cold – even inside this foyer. I adjusted my shirt under my v-neck, still a little unused to the collar.

Emily was in the little room, so was Michael. They looked, well, like Emily and Michael. Nothing out of the ordinary. I opened the door to the performance space: one large room, the small staffroom, and a kitchenette area. My space was upstairs, a desk against the window. The whole lot was free reign for the students – working at the computer, making each other coffees, listening to music in the office. The place was usually buzzing, even at this time of the morning. I half expected to see Mark, the student stage manager for the production, typing the script revisions. He was there, but sitting in the kitchen, quiet. He was slowly sipping a drink, and he waved back at me. I opened the staffroom door. Emily turned to see who it was. I can't remember – were her eyes just red, or was she actually crying then? Michael took me outside the room, told me the news. I felt nothing, except absence.

I went back into the staffroom, talked to Emily. I know that she was crying by now. She gave me a hug. She was shaking, sobbing. I wanted to say something, to comfort her – but the words fell away before I could speak them. I couldn't find the words to describe the space, let alone fill it. I said nothing. Upstairs, at my desk, I sat and looked out of the large windows. Students began to arrive now. I don't remember if they were laughing when they came in. I would like to think so. I remember that their scarves, their blushed faces, their gestures, seemed strange to me. Too real, too normal. Like everything about this day.

Later in the day, I sat with a drama class. I read the official announcement from the news sheet, informed them that there were counsellors in the main hall if anyone needed to speak to them. A few hands went up. I would like to say that I spent that lesson with the class talking about it all, discussing how we felt and what we would do. But I didn't. We didn't. I could say nothing that would make it any better, so I chose to say nothing at all. I was an outsider, an observer, watching from the other side of the glass.



At Westfield High, the set-up was that your kids came in for 'class teacher' at the beginning of the day, and you did the role and all the rest of it, and they

also clocked in at the end of the day for ten minutes, and it was lovely. I had a home room of everybody from 7s to 10s, so you'd get Tony walking in going: "Lost my hat again", and then Danielle bouncing in going: "I won the game in PE! I won the game in PE!", and it was really nice. But I had one girl who'd been transferred into that class, she was a ward of the state, she'd been in six different homes in the past 12 months, and then landed back with her grandmother. She was a mess, one of those really hard to get kids, and where every single one of those kids would come in of an afternoon and be bouncing around and be warm and fuzzy, she most certainly would not.

It ended up that she had a huge fight with one of the science teachers, calling him a something or other, and had been suspended, and the principal called me in to talk to her. I just couldn't get anywhere with her, and I was upset because I was worried about her. I couldn't work out how to get to her, and I wondered what the hell was going to happen to a kid like that. It was scary. I went home that night, still really upset.

My partner said to me: "What's the problem?"

I said: "I can't get through to Amanda."

"Well hang on, how's things with Tony?"

"Fine."

"How's things with Danielle?"

"Fine."

"How's things with Lucas?"

"Fine."

He went through the whole class list, and said: "Right. So you're telling me that you've got one kid in that class that you can't get through to, and that's the problem?"

"Yeah."

"Well stop it, you haven't got a problem. You're doing everything you can, it's not your problem."

He put it in perspective, and he was right, the rest of them were fine. I find it really hard to make that shift on my own. It was easier when I was going

home to someone, then it was easier to make that shift. So I suppose that detachment is always easier when there's another role for you to take on. For me, it was going home and being someone's partner. I'd come home and go: "Off with that hat." I'd put on another one and that was okay. That took the edge off it I suppose.

◆◆◆

You do grieve for what you've lost
but with that whole life change
I didn't let myself.

If you think about the way that you explain yourself
you put yourself into a context:
it's:

I work here
I work with this person
I live here.

And at that age
to suddenly not have that –
at an age when
my peers' lives
were suddenly cementing and becoming terribly
concrete

mine was suddenly very
fluid.

It was a strange place to be
and still is at times.

◆◆◆

I see myself as a drama teacher first. I mean that would obviously change if my personal life was different, but it's what comes first, the chicken or the egg. My professional life is impacting so much on my personal life that it doesn't allow my personal life to change, so I've ended up in a circle.

◆◆◆

After everything I had thought about where I was going to be...

That was incredibly hard, because in terms of that line, nobody knew. I didn't tell anybody that that was happening, so I was keeping up 'a front'. I think a lot of teachers do that. I know I'm not the only one who does that. We were talking about it today:

I don't know if this is a society thing – that society expects us to do that, and sometimes you think maybe that's not exactly a realistic expectation.

Occasionally, when your life's falling apart, you may need to take some time out.



Kids at college age, they need to see that you're human. They're trying to work out how they fit, and so in seeing someone else, and seeing that teachers are human too, I think that helps them adjust. It's that step between being a child and being an adult. They can relate to us as adults, and we relate to them as adults.



I can remember Tammy Brown, my college drama teacher, having a huge personal loss when I was in year 12. She had us prepare several pieces of poetry and prose ready for selection for the end of the year and one of the pieces that I had chosen was Emily Bronte's *Remembrance*, and I can remember Tam saying: "I don't want you to do that one because I can't handle it."

I can remember saying to myself: "Yeah, Tam won't handle that one."

I looked at the work and thought: *No, Tam's not strong enough to help me with this, it can go aside.* In writing for this project I was thinking about it, and Tam had made a good call, that was a wise call, and I wonder sometimes. Especially at this level, when you're working with scripts, they are fabulous

plays to work on, but they do make you think. In directing them and in the discussions we have, I can't help but bring my own life experience to it. I think that's what directing does and that's why I think teaching at this level can be sometimes more demanding on you as a human being. You do share what you know, you do share where you've been and what your experiences are. I think you do it just that little bit more so than you do with a grade 7 or 8 class, just because of where they're at, and the material. If I was teaching grade 7 it would be easy to grab something like a picture book and go in there and be completely silly, but by grade 11 and 12, the kids are at an age when they can handle far more adult things so you tend to do that.



I think to a degree, the line between me, and me as a teacher was blurred when I went to Paterson College. It was the fact that suddenly you were known by your first name, and that is an incredibly humanising thing. I don't think of myself as Miss Reade, so that became a mask that I put on when I would go into a classroom. I suppose that also affects the way that you relate to your kids.

It was funny that at Westfield High the kids all knew our first names too, and I had one boy in my English class and in my drama class, and he was just hysterically funny. At times when he couldn't get my attention if I was doing something else, he would actually say: "Emily...", and I'd go: "Yes, Anthony Phillip?"

It was a joke between us and it was okay. I don't think anybody would dare even think of someone's first name at Frankland High. Teachers went back into their box at night and were locked in there.

So at Paterson College I could be myself again, which did make me I suppose, in some ways, blur that line a little bit.



I'm working more and more on finding out where my boundaries are, and trying to retain bits for me. Rather than having it all as material, some of it has to stay back.

♦ ♦ ♦

I love Paterson College
because of where the kids are at this age
because they're starting to work out
who they are
and that's what's so exciting about it.

I suppose in a way
it forces you to be very aware
of who
you
are
because they're asking so many questions
of themselves
they can't help but throw those questions
back at you sometimes too
and it does make you think
and it does make you look
at how you relate
and who you are.

It's quite challenging
to the identity
because you can't fall back on the old
"I'm a teacher"
cliché.

You can't fall into that stereotype –
you just can't.

♦ ♦ ♦

I've now become very aware of roles and of when I'm in "professional mode" and when I'm in "me mode", and that's very different. This isn't a bad thing, and it's interesting, in that it hasn't altered what I do so much, just the way I react to it. I'm still doing the same things, but I'm doing them with a different

attitude. I'm still sharing resources and ideas, but it almost seems like it's not my voice. It's a very different voice.



When you're directing
you're dealing with experience
and so you do find yourself
delving in
and looking at experiences
at emotions
and making meaning
of what has happened to you
and so
your own life becomes a resource.

I mean that's what actors do
and I think when you're directing
and when you're working at this level
you do too.

I think you do to an extent with younger kids
but often it's not quite
so
close
to
home.



I think the personal does impact on the professional to a large extent, and I think maybe as drama teachers we are just a little bit more conscious of it. I'm sure it happens to a degree to other teachers too, but maybe because drama's so much about relationships and how people fit in, I think we're just a little bit more conscious of it.



Foundations. This word came to me frequently during my conversations with Emily, and later in my conversations with the texts of our interviews. It troubled me, becoming a question hidden inside an answer. Something in what she had said, or the way it was said: this talk of boundaries, circles,

depths. Where, I wondered, were her foundations? How were these foundations shaken or cracked by the events she had described?

Foundation:

1. The lowest load-bearing part of a building, typically below ground level.
 2. An underlying basis or principal for something.
- (New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998, p. 724).

I had always thought of my professional self as distanced somehow from who I was more broadly. In a sense, I felt that one must be built on top of the other – sure, who I am as a teacher draws upon how I see myself, but it is both more and less than ‘me’. And it couldn’t exist without the support of the other, could it? But as I spoke with Emily, I began to have less faith in this metaphor.

A foundation is undoubtedly solid, undoubtedly fixed. While we can change what we build on top of this, the foundation itself cannot change. It is planned, drafted, built, only for the purpose of support. A foundation does not interact with the object built above it, although this object could not exist in isolation. Is this how identity works? After talking with Emily, I’m not so sure. Why must there be a coherent whole? Why must the parts of who I am ‘add up’ to anything at all?

Perhaps identity is instead a process of chiaroscuro², light and dark, weaving into each other, interacting but never merging into coherence? Perhaps the ‘whole’ is the tension, the contrast, the interplay – the process, rather than the outcome? The sense of form, the sense of space, emerge from the shifts of light, and the shifts in the eye of the perceiver. Perhaps the foundations for who I am, and who Emily is, do not come from underneath, but from across – the overlaps, the blurred lines and boundaries of light and shade created by each disparate part? Perhaps our boundaries, our depths, are there to preserve this pattern, to alter its shape, sharpen the contours, rather than smooth this contrast into a charcoal grey?



² I have adapted the metaphor of chiaroscuro from Caroline Picart’s (in Flemons and Green, 2002, p. 190) discussion of the dichotomous relationship between illness and health.

I think you've got to learn
and I'm learning
where to put the boundaries
but for sure there can be times
when you don't make those judgements clearly
and it can be really difficult.

But I think it's about learning
where to put the boundaries in.

Sometimes you only know
how deep it is
by actually stepping in
and going in over your head
so you do need to find
where boundaries are.

I think I've got a much better idea
about where
the
bottom
is now.

3. Playing roles

He³ manages to fit in, to find a place for himself. The true test, after all, is to be like everyone else. Once that happens, he no longer has to question his singularity (Auster, 1987, p. 273).



I'm still coming to terms
with that whole
change
of who I am
and how I fit
into a social context.

I think it's the same
with staff members at a school
as anywhere else.

There's the blokes
and there's the married women with kids

³ "He" is Fanshawe, one of the central characters in *The Locked Room*, part of novelist Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*.

and there's the ones
 who haven't got kids
and it's always like:

*Who do
I
fit in with?*

◆◆◆

Role speaks to function whereas identity voices investments and commitments. Function, or what one should do, and investments, or what one feels, are often at odds (Britzman, 1992, p. 29).

◆◆◆

It's cause and effect. Put a flame against paper and it'll ignite. Put a flame against steel, and nothing visible will happen.

◆◆◆

When Michael left Paterson College on his teaching exchange, I felt really responsible. Really responsible for keeping the whole place going, and there was a feeling that without Michael there, because we had been such a strong team, that there wasn't anybody else. I used to leave my office and go for lunch with a friend, and another colleague actually seriously encouraged me to do it, because she said: "You go away and you get a break, and we see, we actually get a taste of what you're getting every day, because there's a hundred and one kids running around going where's Em, where's Em, where's Em?"

Because Michael had gone, I was the one who was known, so things all ended up channelling into me. I was also trying to guard Jill, the teacher who had come here on exchange with Michael.

She had such a difficult year. Difficult because absolutely everything was new, and it was a strange dynamic, because she was so concerned about getting things right. That meant that I was often trying to shield her, and protect her, and make sure she had the room to get things right. At the same time, while she was so concerned about getting things right, she wouldn't ask when she wasn't sure. Again it was me in a management position, so I was trying to guide her and get her to make sure that she was doing things. Michael and I had been much more democratic. I knew where his strengths were, he knew where mine were, and we just worked it out between us, and neither of us seemed to ever take offence at what the other was doing, it was just that's what we did. I think we'd almost taken each other's working styles for granted. Jill, though, had been in a position where she was second in charge in a London school, and while I didn't realise it until almost the last week she was here, she was relating to me the way she'd related to her head teacher back in London. It was really strange, she would push things over to me that Michael and I would have taken equal responsibility for, and sometimes I was taking them on where in hindsight, I would have been better off pushing them back.

I was worried about her being thrown in the deep end. It turned out that in trying to support her, I was drowning myself.

♦ ♦ ♦

I'm still not sure
Jill was seeing
me.

I think she was seeing
Gabby –
her boss in London.

She was looking to me
to be an absolute leader
and I wanted to say:

*No
I'm a colleague
I'm not your*

*boss
I don't have the right
to tell you what to do
I can guide you
but I don't have the right
to tell you.*

Yet I felt so
responsible.

It pushed me
into roles
I wasn't necessarily
comfortable
being in.

That role thing
is a really interesting factor.

It does shape your work
but it also does
shape the way
you see yourself
and I can't
get
away
from that.

*It's almost like –
it doesn't necessarily
change
the way you see yourself.*

*I think, rather, it perhaps makes you
more
aware
of the way you see yourself.*

Yeah.

♦ ♦ ♦

Working with Jill, I became very aware of what I was good at, and that was a good thing. It meant I was really pushed to the limit on lots of things, and so at the same time, it made me aware of my weaknesses, which was also a good thing. It was a year of suddenly being put in the spotlight, and everything became very clear.



In London, Jill was very much used to having a room that was hers and hers alone, whereas here we were very used to sharing the space that we had. Because of this, we were also very used to the set ‘going up’⁴ at the very last minute, and blocking the play with whatever else was around up until the day before, then putting the set in, because that actually meant that other groups could continue to work in the space.

The midyear performance exams were approaching, and Jill wanted the space set up for her group’s performance a week beforehand.

This actually meant that my classes had no rehearsal room. I had a really large class too, and in order to achieve what we needed to do, I split the class into groups, with each doing different sections of Brecht plays. Each group had a student director and they had been working along that way, and suddenly we just had no rehearsal space. My understanding was that another student, who was working as stage manager, would work with the directors, and every time he came to me I would say: “No, you speak to the directors. I’m not directing, speak to them.” Unfortunately, that had been interpreted as: “Well I don’t have to do anything,” and so nothing had happened.

Jill had interpreted this as: “Well, they don’t need a set, they don’t need any space.” It got to two mornings before our performance, and one of the boys went to move a block so that they could actually make some space. Jill went ‘right off’ at him. I went ‘right off’ back, and it got quite heated. I got very upset, and very frustrated, and one of my students actually came up and gave me a hug and said: “It’s going to be okay, we’re fine.” I was grateful for that. In the end, my students pulled things together and they did a good job, but they never had proper rehearsal space. I just said: “Look, I’ll assess what we’ve done. I’ll assess what we’ve achieved from this perspective, but I just

⁴ In drama terminology, this refers to the construction and placement of all background elements for a performance – lighting, props, stage construction, etc.

won't assess it as a polished performance, because you obviously can't give that."

They were okay with that, but I felt really frustrated. It was like I'd given too much, and I suppose that's one of the things that I'm learning now, and that I'm very aware of. I will give so much, but there's points now, where I will say no.

♦ ♦ ♦

At the start of last year, I went to a really interesting workshop at school. The presenter talked about the importance of teacher support, of the need for us to have that sense of connectedness and a significant other or a support network, in order for us to be able to be that for students. Looking back now, I can see that I had been missing that, for quite a while.

♦ ♦ ♦

I've worked on staffs
where I've felt completely
safe.

Like when it was Michael
Michelle
and I –

I knew where everything fitted
I knew how everything worked
and it was
lovely.

But when I was at Frankland High
I used to:
 walk into work every morning
 throw up
 pull myself together
 visualise my clothes as armour
 and I just had to
to survive.

I left Frankland High
with an irregular heartbeat –

my heartbeat goes:

beat

beat

beatbeatbeatbeat

...

(oh)

beat

so it was heavy going.

So yes –

if you don't feel safe

it's really

really

hard.

◆◆◆

I had Stacey Weston on prac with me at Frankland High, she was student teaching. We just used to joke about the atmosphere of the place, because she was older, and I think she could see what was going on. She was also an outsider, so she could see what was going on from that perspective. We used to joke about it, we'd close the classroom door and lock it, and make jokes about locking the door so that we were safe.

There were times when I had absolutely magical classes with the kids, like working with the Boal⁵ material. I ended up using some of Boal's ideas, and we took that into a fairy story, and we created this beautiful thing. We made a great big dragon's head, and it took two of the students to operate it. It was beautiful Papier Mache, I made the frame and the bulk of it for the kids and then we decorated and shaped it together. I loved doing it. I loved that creative stuff that I hadn't had the chance to do, and we had a ball on that project.

So you had moments, but it was such hard work. It was again, once you locked the classroom door and it was just you and the kids it was fine, but the staffroom was always a battle zone.

⁵ Augusto Boal is a Brazilian theatre worker, playwright, and activist. In the 1970s. he pioneered an approach called the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1979), which employs drama strategies to examine participants' own lives, with the purpose of identifying problems and oppressions, and exploring ways of overcoming these.



There's a funny thing with drama teachers – I don't think we get the opportunity very often to be in departments. We're often isolated, and we're used to being a one man band, and we are often such individuals. To actually put a heap of us together, or put us into new situations, sometimes I'm not sure that we can be that good at fitting in with somebody else's plans. We're just so used to doing it our own way.



It's funny
how you play roles sometimes.

If someone plays one role
you automatically fall
into a corresponding role
without sometimes
even being
conscious
of it.

4. Caring

In schools we become civilised by denying attachment... we consign primitive feeling, passionate commitments, to domesticity, and then we construct a public space purged of such contaminants. But attachment and difference never disappear just because we declare them invisible. They always seep back in. Schools have never been neutral places. (Grumet, 1988, p. 181)



The nature of teaching
is that
teaching doesn't necessarily just
happen in a particular context.

Lots of people are teachers

and maybe that teacher role
is more like a facilitator
or something like that.

I think we often see
teachers
as not
caring
or not
loving –
that image of a teacher
as something
harsh.

I don't see myself like that
at all.



Because Paterson College is so big, when we had the three suicides in 18 months I hadn't even taught the first two students. Some of our kids knew them, and so we got the ripple effect from that. One of them died while we were doing *Godspell*, and Chris, who was playing Judas, just came into rehearsal one night and he was just so still. This was a guy who didn't stop moving, and the music teacher and I just looked at each other and said: "He's not right."

He was probably closest to the two of us, so we grabbed him and I said:
"What's going on?"

He just fell apart, and it was because his friend had died, and he was just so devastated. He said: "I didn't know, I didn't realise he was in that much trouble." So we got affected by that, but it wasn't until Dennis – the third kid – died, that it really hit home. He was one of ours, a drama kid. I'd seen Chris the night before, he was having problems at home, and another student who we were looking after I knew did have a mental illness and I was worried about her too, and I'd also been working with her. I suppose what struck me the morning we found out, was that my first reaction was almost of relief: it

wasn't one of those two. And then it was horrible. It was like three seconds of: "Oh thank god..." quickly followed by: "Oh god no."

I was thinking it was one of those two and it was somebody else, and I just thought, and felt, horrible. And the fact was that I'd taught Dennis the year before, in that year when everything was going so badly wrong for me. I'd done some work with him then, and soon after he'd gone back home to his parents, and was going to sort himself out. I just kept thinking: *If I'd been a bit more on the ball then, maybe I would have worked out that this was a bit more serious.* Later in talking to people, they were saying: "Well no that was really quite irrational, that's stupid." But when that kind of thing happens, you do go through those what-ifs.

◆◆◆

I think in lots of ways
a good drama class works like that –
you're part of a circle.

You may be the one
holding the whole thing together
but that doesn't mean
you're any less important
or more important
than any other part of it
and I think that's how
the best drama class operates.

◆◆◆

You get to a stage where you can be all cared out. You can reach a point sometimes where it's the kids who actually start to do all the caring.

◆◆◆

Tess was a student in my 9/10 drama class at my first school, before Westfield. We got along well. One night towards the end of the year she called me at home and told me she was going swallow everything she could

find in the medicine cabinet. I had no car, and she was alone in a house a good twenty minutes away. I kept her on the phone and talking to me until her sister got home, and then phoned my assistant principal and let him know what had happened. In a sense, I was relieved that Tess thought she could talk to me. We are still in contact, and catch up about once every twelve months. She's now studying psychology.

My mum's a nurse. I can remember one day when I got a card from Tess, and it was sitting on my kitchen bench, mum came in and made some comment about it. I said: "Oh yeah, Tess still keeps in touch."

Mum's married to a teacher now too, which makes a difference, and she said: "Well I don't think you need to be quite that close to them dear."

I replied: "Why not?"

"You just don't need to be."

It's not like Tess and I are close and in contact at all times. I might not have seen her for months, but if she's driving past she'll always wave.

For kids like Tess, it's just the fact that someone honestly thinks they are nice people. I suppose that's the thing: a lot of these kids I actually genuinely do like as people, they *are* nice people, and I may not see them for weeks, months, or years, but I'll still care that they're okay.

♦♦♦

I think I am very good at getting a group to work as a team, and to actually care about each other. I think most of the students in my classes come away knowing each other really well. I don't think I've ever actually had a class who came away hating each other and not knowing who that person was, sitting in the corner.

♦♦♦

I value the sense of joy and appreciation that the students can have for each other in drama. My stage 5⁶ drama class last year were just gorgeous. I can remember in Winter, around June, they would walk in each morning and be cold, so they would walk in and give each other a hug, and go and put the coffee on, and worry about Dan's fingers being frostbitten, and fuss over each other. It used to be just so lovely to see that they cared about each other that much, and that that can happen in this context.

Also they do learn about themselves and about each other and I can remember two of them, who at the start of the year had such difficulty working together, at the end of the year, I put them in a group together again, and they could sit there and say: "Well no I know you want this, and I can understand where you're coming from, but I really want this. Can we find a way of meeting in the middle?"

There were three of them, two of them had been going out together and split up, while Hailey and Tom just didn't particularly like each other, and yet they will still walk up to each other now, and give each other a hug and say hello and fuss over each other. They had grown so much in that year, from the very beginning, to being able to sit down and go: "Well that's going to make it okay for you, and if you give me this, this'll make it okay for me." They could also say: "Okay we're different, but I still actually appreciate you and who you are." That was such a huge growth, and such a good thing to see, and I suppose I value that drama can do that, it can make people see the essential sameness that we all have, but also appreciate the differences and the variety. I suppose that's what I value the most.



I've come to realise that caring for yourself is really important. You can't care about anybody else unless you care about yourself.

⁶ The Tasmanian senior (Grades 9-12) drama curriculum includes courses that move along a series of 'Stages', from Stage 1 drama (the most basic), to Stage 5 (the most advanced course), designed to introduce students to a range of drama techniques and processes. Stage 5 drama is a pre-tertiary course, meaning that students' results in this course will contribute to their university entrance score.



In terms of my students, Mark was a really interesting one. He had such a huge impact on me, because I was watching him grow. Often I didn't feel like I was doing that much, I was just giving him a safe haven, and a place where he could work out who he was, and what he wanted and that was okay, and I wasn't judging him in any way. I just watched him grow and grow and grow from that, and the fact is that he will still email me, or send me a text message when he's home, and come and see me. I'm grateful to him for remembering that I still care about him, and so I think he's really important to me, and the fact that he's doing so well in his chosen field is lovely. It's funny, I got Casey, one of my students from last year, to interview him, and even in that interview, he still talked about some of the rules that I was setting for him. He was talking about stage management, and he said he learnt at Paterson College never to say no, just to say: "That may take me a little while."

It was interesting that he remembered those things, and I can remember one day, pulling him aside when he was the stage manager, because he'd been so rude to the actors. I pulled him aside and gave him an absolute 'dressing down', and told him not to be so rude, and how dare he treat actors that way, they were working with him, and he wasn't to do that. He made reference to it in that interview, the fact that he still remembered it, and he was like: "Yeah, Em was right." It was just so funny, and so sweet, and it was good that he remembered me in that way.



There is a serious investment in teaching, and I don't know that you'd even stay in it, if you didn't have that investment. I mean you've got to have some serious commitment, to put up with having kids tell you to fuck off, and being responsible for them when they're trying to kill each other. You've got to have a pretty serious commitment to do that.

I suppose it's about caring about far more than whether they can do their times table. It's caring about who they are as people.

◆◆◆

One of the things
that I've realised
through this process
is that
in my role as
a drama teacher
I spend a lot of time
looking out for people.

That was really interesting
I suppose I'd always
realised
that about myself
but I hadn't realised
just how *much*
I was doing.

It's funny
that I can't
in my own mind
divorce
that
from what drama teaching is all about.

I think drama teaching is actually about
making connections
and
caring about people
and caring about
relationships with people
and I think the two go
hand
in
hand.

I can't find
where that point
separates.

5. Conclusion

I remember a story, or an article, I once read. I don't remember whether it was true or not. It was about an actress, who threw herself completely into

every role that she played. To begin with, it was almost a game for her. When she found a role in a production, she would leave her husband, leave her own life, and prepare. If she was to play a prostitute, she would rent a cheap apartment, and pick up men. If she was to play a homeless woman, she would sleep on the streets for weeks. It was like she was gambling, on how much of herself to invest, how many pieces to put on the table. Her performances were stunning, her characters so vivid, that audiences were shocked. But when the sets came down, she would be buried, lost – the end of each season the death of what she had found and built. Her characters drowned her, holding her head under until she surrendered. They would only loosen their grip when there was nothing left. She was becoming a ghost.

The next day she would learn to breathe again, to walk, to take shape. But as time went on, these deaths became more violent, more permanent. Each time she died, there was a little less to reach for, a little more shadow and a little less form. Her performances began to suffer. People came to see her, but they began to see these shadows, like a spreading darkness with no centre. Each time she invested a little more, she would have a little more to lose. In the end she had nothing to take away. I don't remember how the story ended. A particularly long season, the end of her family and perhaps the end of her, seem familiar.

There is a question in this story, I think – and not a question about performing on a stage. It is the same question that I ask when I read this text: how much should I invest in what I do? I'm not suggesting that Emily, or I, would go to the lengths I've just described, invest this much, but the issue remains – how much is too much? We care, we give ourselves and we face the pressures and the possibility of nothingness, of running out. Where would we find meaning, or the space and perspective outside of ourselves to know who we were, if this was not the case? But if we continue to give, to place pieces of ourselves on the table, how will we know when we have lost the game? As Emily herself said, something has to stay back. To find the limits, do we need to step over them?

♦♦♦

There is a danger

in teaching
in nursing
in social work
all those people professions.

You can give so much of yourself
that there's
nothing left.

I wonder if that's what happens
with burnout
and why drama teachers
are so susceptible to it.

My year group started
ten years ago yesterday –

There are two of us
left

and I've been standing
longest.

And now at Paterson College –

I'm the last one
standing.

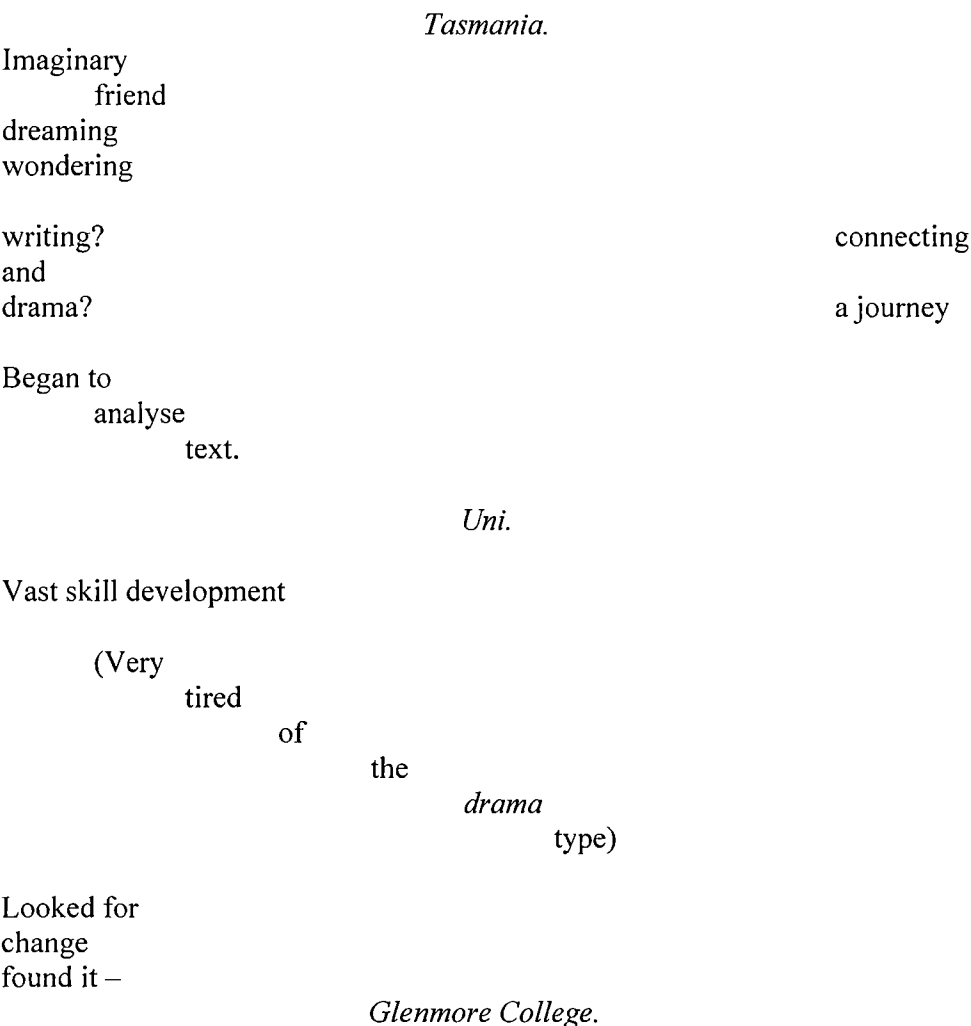
I'm the last one
left.

10.
Molly Hayes

In education, we don't think about our personality within the scheme of things, but we're so important. This has given me a great sense of perspective. I thought that I might start to have a few doubts about what I do, but in fact it's strengthened my belief. It's really beneficial reading over the notes and thinking about how I've come to this particular stage. Now I've started thinking about where I want to go, and what I'm going to do with what I've learned. (Molly, Interview 3, p.14)

1. Introduction

The text below is constructed from Molly's initial timeline:



Sydney.

Dealing with
discipline
(saw everything)

professional teaching

theatre

vs.

strong
(tired)
life
change –

Tasmania.

Strong
class.

Southlands College.

(Use of self
=
more confident)

reflecting

Continue.

2. Then

Then:
I never liked
those teachers
that didn't have
that
human
element.

♦ ♦ ♦

I've been thinking about it a lot – about how I see myself and all those things. I really can't pin it down to anything in particular.

♦ ♦ ♦

1.

You can take it all a little bit too personally.



University was a vast skill development for me. It really turned it up a notch, so that rather than just playing around with drama, making up plays and performing, we actually got into different acting techniques and developments, so I found that a big change. I really enjoyed university. I found the English incredibly dull there – incredibly dull. I had really enjoyed English in year 11 and 12, but at university it was just all that talking, and I just thought: *Why teach such a human subject in such a sterile way?* I did enjoy the texts though, and it was a great expansion for me, but I never understood why it was taught like that.

I found the teaching part easy – it came naturally to me, whenever I went into the classroom. I had excellent pracs too, and that was another thing that was really important. I always had really strong supervising teachers, and was so lucky to have such gifted people, and as you know the pracs teach you an enormous amount. It was terrible to see the people around you having horrible times and dropping out, or questioning why they were doing it and all that, but to me it came quite easily. I'm not one of those people who are gifted in anything, but I felt comfortable with the kids, and I felt secure with my content area, so that was fine.

In my fourth year, I went to Paterson College for my internship, where I remember taking a class that were staging an Ibsen play. That was a very valuable experience – to take six weeks, and actually direct the students, and for the students to be so responsive. Now I just remember the whole process – from the beginning, with the casting of it, to working it through, to bringing something like Ibsen to students in Launceston, and having that crossover of culture and time and generations and all those sorts of things. It made me realise the power of the text and of the playwright, and that was very

rewarding for me as a teacher – for the students to actually put that on, and for that to be a really enjoyable experience for them, rather than just having to do it for assessment. That was hard work, but rewarding.

When I think about it now though, I think about how slow I must have been, and how painful that must have been for the students. After you’ve done it a few times you do it so quickly, but back then I would have laboured over it, as I did with things.



I’ve been really lucky, because I’ve had lots of positive experiences. Other people have said that when they started out they had to go to schools and work with people that they didn’t like, or they had horrible classes and were put off by them, but everything I’ve had has been really positive. I had a romantic fantasy for a while that I wanted to be a florist, because I thought that would be a bit easier, but it wasn’t very often when I said I didn’t want to be a teacher any more. And then I moved to Sydney and got a job in the boys’ school.



When I arrived at the school in Sydney, which was a Catholic high school, there was no drama whatsoever. I had no idea about Catholic education. I was christened a Catholic, or baptised or whatever you are, but I really didn’t have any idea about it, and I just wanted a job.

There was no set drama classes or anything, and they didn’t have much of an idea about drama at all, so I was teaching drama across the curriculum. It was like: “Oh well, you can go into science, and do this science drama.” The science teachers didn’t want me in the class, and the maths teachers never spoke to me, so all I’d do was go in and teach kids within their english time in the first year, and it was not very rewarding at all. All I was doing all day was just disciplining. Prior to my arrival, the students’ only encounter with group

work was on the rugby field, and the rest of the time they still sat in rows and thumped each other viciously and at any given opportunity. I can remember numbering them off around a circle to put them into groups one day, and after I had finished doing the ‘numbered heads’, they were like: “Why did we need to remember that?” They had no idea they would have to remember their number. They just didn’t do that, because they’d come through that system, and they were quite repressed.

I had limited experience with “males on mass”, and even today I wake in fright at the horrors of schoolboy violence – the blood, the tears and the occasional displays of bravado. I used to do yard duty, up at the back fence, and the students were just horrible. If a fight was to start, and a fight would often start, they would all just run in and cram around it, and there was nothing you could do to break that up, or to break down that sort of thing. They were incredibly homophobic, and they were always talking about each others’ sexuality. They’d insult each other through sexual connotation, and they’d insult each other by saying horrible things about mothers and sisters and dogs, and all sorts of stuff. I found that really shocking, because I came from a family of girls, and it’s fairly sheltered here in Tasmania as far as that goes. So they were pretty tough.

I became tough there. I was so horrible, and the things I used to say to them were terrible. I’d never say those things to a kid now. I just became really tough, because everybody else was really tough.

◆◆◆

It was terrifying
to be put in
a room
with 30 boys
who don’t
want
to
listen
to you

and you just use
all of your
resources.

I wasn't teaching
drama
I was doing
crowd
control
and surviving
and getting through
the day.

The first year
it was horrible
I'd just go
to the pub afterwards
and drink
and wish
it
was
all
over.

It made me incredibly
homesick
but it made me
really
determined
too.



Being a drama teacher, I was also a bit of a game player. So I played a few games there, like getting 'onside' with the nice tough boy, who played in the football team. I got him onside and he did drama as an option in year 9, and then he brought a few of his mates in the next year, and it was actually quite a good class. The students were all scared of the Assistant Principals, so I'd get them in to growl at the boys when they 'mucked up'. In the end I used to just say: "Right, we're not doing it. Sit down, we're doing theory." I did lots of theory.

After a while they knew that I meant business, and that they could either do theory or the fun stuff. It *was* fun, because it was gimmicky. They weren't

really learning anything about drama – it was doing things like a prison drama, where they were just following instructions: “You’re in prison. You’re a prisoner, let’s plan out the prison...” So I involved lots of things where they had to do writing – they’d have to do a map of something, and then we’d do a bit of action and then we’d come back down and do another piece of writing. They were so unused to working in groups, that they needed to do that to calm down. It wasn’t really the right way to teach, but it was the way to survive the day.



In drama, you’re not working through the textbook. You’re the one taking everything in – and nobody says you’ve got to do this or that, it’s all up to you.



Over time, drama began to develop at the school. The year 7s were alright by the time they were in year 8. By the time they were in year 10, they were fantastic. There were still lots of kids who didn’t enjoy it – they did it in year 7 and 8 because that was compulsory, but then there were only ever 20 or so kids out of 140 each year that did it beyond that. It was never going to be as big as computer studies, but it had its place, and it had quite a high profile. So it did establish itself, and it was quite successful by the time I left, after five years. I felt like I’d really achieved something and set something up. The school was really pleased with the way it went – I had one drama space, and I’d set up another space, and resourced the whole thing, and felt like I’d made a difference there. I felt like the school had changed. It wasn’t because of me as such, but the school had changed in the time I was there.

They were fabulous years. They were demanding, but fabulous. I used to go home in tears, because the kids would be so horrible to me. It was all the highs and lows and the extremes of it.

I don't do any of that any more.

♦ ♦ ♦

I certainly felt
very
burnt
out
then –

*(therewasathingthatdramateachersonlylastsevenyears
orsomething,andIcertainlythoughtI'dnevergetbacktoitagain)*

I went back to teaching
in Tasmania.

By the time
I was at my
second school there
I wasn't teaching any
drama.

I was only teaching
english.

Then:
after about six months
I got my confidence back
and I picked it up again
and now
I'm
fine.

♦ ♦ ♦

2.

Drama is about self, and it's about your positioning and perspective on life, I suppose, and you can't divorce yourself completely from what you do every day.

♦ ♦ ♦

I was always quite withdrawn as a child. I just always felt really lost, and I never really liked school, and I don't really think I established myself. But then by about year 9, you become very conformist and you want to fit in – so all that adolescent stuff, and all those hormones, kick in and then I think I really began to enter the real world.

I spent a lot of my time as a child just simply imagining, and creating, and I used to write stories and illustrate them, all those sorts of things. I was always comfortable in groups and worked well in groups, but I was never an extrovert. People say all the time: “Oh, you'll be right, you're a drama teacher.”

I say to them: “Look at some of the most famous actors in the world, like John Hurt, they are actually quite introverted and quite shy.” I think people mistake being a drama teacher for showing off. I don't see it as showing off. I see it as being about self-development.

◆◆◆

Changing school
or changing city
or whatever
were obviously really
important experiences
and I don't
 handle
 change
very well.

I don't think
human beings
 handle
 change
very well.

You've
almost
got
to
re
construct

yourself
each time
to fit a
system.

You're not
overly changing
your delivery
or whatever,

you're just changing
yourself
slightly
 *(camouflaging
 yourself)*
in order to
cope within the
environment.



They weren't very happy years when I first came back from Sydney. I didn't really want to come back here, but I just felt a bit wounded and exhausted, and I knew I didn't want to live in Sydney any more. That really reflected on the work that I chose, and when I think about what pieces I chose for my students, I must have been such a misery guts. The first two years that I was back here were horrible. Just horrible times.

There was a bit of turmoil there personally, and when you start feeling insecure about things, you start really examining yourself, whereas when you feel comfortable and relaxed, you tend to just go along with it. Those moments of crisis are really important, and they do impact on the classroom. They have to, because they're part of you.

I think that what you do is maybe when things aren't going well personally, you really want to pull something together. So you throw yourself at your professional life and try to make that work, because that'll give you a sense of worth that maybe you're not getting from anywhere else, or it'll give you a sense of stability that you're not getting from anywhere else.

You get tired, I think, and you just know you've got to back off a little bit. It can wear you out, drama. It can be so emotional and you can take it all a little bit too personally, whereas other subject areas don't do that. They last for years and years, but drama can be so emotive, watching kids go through those transformations. Helping them go through that can be quite exhausting.



I'm not one of those people that love children. I'm not one of those people that really get in with the kids. I don't muck down with them like some other people do. I do it because I love the content of it, and I like the art of learning.



I've never met a drama teacher who uses reflection very well, and I've never met a drama teacher who de-roles particularly well, and I don't do those things either.

A friend of mine was a family court counsellor, and where she worked, all of the counsellors actually had to go to counselling themselves. They used to go to counselling just to talk about themselves, and what was happening, because all day they hear about other people's domestic issues and strife. Every couple of months they'd go off, and sometimes they'd just chat, or there might be a problem, and they would actually deconstruct what they had been doing, and really it was just to dump on somebody else for a while.

In drama, you need to get rid of it somehow. You need to let it out. You do night performances, and you do all these things, then you go home and you just sit there. The performer has to have some chance to reflect, or to de-role, or whatever, and often the drama teacher doesn't have that, particularly if they've got one subject and they work by themselves.

We ask kids

to reflect, and
we need to
get
it
out
also

(don't we?)

and put it somewhere.

It needs
placing
somewhere.

If it sits
in your gut
it'll
give
you
pains.

◆◆◆

3.

Drama makes you question the world you live in, and the way you react to the world.

◆◆◆

One of the earliest images I have of myself as a child is having this imaginary friend, and the friend went on for quite a long time, until about the age of nine. I think it's because my older sister didn't play with me, and we were only 18 months apart, so I developed this sort of friend, and I think he left later on when my younger sister grew up and she began to play with me. For whatever reason, I developed that friend.

My mother tells me that at the time it was quite believable. She says she used to watch me just have this dialogue for hours – I'd just sit on the wood heap and talk to this imaginary kid. People used to tease me about it, and my father

used to send birthday cards and presents from my friend, and hide them around the house, but I always knew it was him and it wasn't really my friend. People tried to join in, and the story became bigger each time, so for example every time somebody tried to interfere with the relationship, my friend would be away, gone to Paris for a week or something. It became an ongoing saga and journey.

I think that living in a small community really impacted on me. My parents were really involved in the community, and I always felt comfortable and safe there in that group. I'm constantly aware of that with students now: *Do they feel safe? Do they feel comfortable to learn here?* The moment you're frightened your brain disengages, doesn't it? So that all comes from that background – that small Tasmanian background. You also get a lot of reward in a small community. When I was older I did some public speaking at the local service clubs, and we did a children's theatre performance, and I got a lot of positive feedback. People would see you and say: "Oh, I saw you in that show." They used to have concerts every year, and I was always involved in that. I quite liked that idea of performance and reinforcement – it was very encouraging.

♦ ♦ ♦

When you come
from a community
like that
a really
small
community
(towns of
2000 or
3000 people),

when you're living in that town
teaching looks good –

(doesn't it?)

teaching is a way out of there.

What else are you going to do?

You're not going to stay there and become a potato farmer's wife.
You want to do something with your life.

♦♦♦

I was never going to be an actor. They weren't like me.

♦♦♦

I think every adolescent will always need one significant individual. I've met students that I've taught years afterwards; for example I met this complete ratbag the other week, and he had become just the most charming person, and had straightened himself up, and got off the drugs, and got a good job, and was just absolutely delighted to talk to me. I thought when he saw me he would sneer at me or spit in my direction, but instead he talked about how he had been a ratbag, and how he had straightened himself up, and how he had enjoyed my class, and how nice it was to see me. I would never have thought he'd be somebody like that – not that I think I was necessarily his significant individual.

You never know what sort of impact you have. For a lot, there's nothing and you've just taught them and got them through the system and that's it, that's all they need. But for some, something changes in there, and that's the really good thing about teaching. It's the most rewarding thing about it. Everybody says that, but it's true.

♦♦♦

In the last couple of years in Sydney, one of the biggest things I saw about drama was that it created empathy. You could change the students' perceptions of bullying, or you could start changing their perception of life. You could put them in another person's shoes, and I started to see changes in behaviour. You could actually use it as a tool, to fix things that were happening in the classroom.

◆◆◆

I like metaphors and I like symbols because I'm a drama teacher and also a creative writing teacher. I think symbol is very important in drama, and I think it's often underused. I really respond to that, and I respond to that not only in the classroom, but in my life.

◆◆◆

Part of the problem in Sydney was that I never belonged to the community. It was a catholic boys' school, and so I didn't belong to the school, because it was so far removed from my own experience. It was a community as such, but it wasn't a community that I ever felt like I'd want to stay in for a long time, so that was part of the change too. When I came back, I found a place in the community, and a belief in that. A drama class is like a small community: you meet, you undertake these things, and then you leave, but you always have that connection to it. You remember the people if not the actual process. You remember the collective experience.

3. Interlude: The navigator (Part 1)

I suppose I see myself as charting a course for the students – a journey.

As a navigator in Sydney I was poor. More than this, as I simply spent the majority of time lost. It was remarkable I was able to find my way to the Catholic High School at all, as it was tucked behind a train line segregated by a park, and disguised as an ecological attraction by the rain forest at the front of the school. As I arrived fresh faced from Tasmania, the rain forest certainly appealed to my sense of nostalgia. Little did I realize no student was allowed in this area. They were confined to the asphalt, barren wasteland, which was shaded by a token, if somewhat crippled, tree.

The experience was fundamental in shaping me as a drama teacher. On the whole, it offered me some of my most rewarding educational experiences so far. At times, I was flexible and dynamic, producing engaging and stimulating dramas. At other times I was messy and autocratic, giving the students no scope for creativity or freedom of expression. The school allowed for such extremes and the students were tolerant of inconsistent and often unfair treatment. It was part of the system. They suffered greatly under my survival techniques, formally known as teaching techniques. I no longer employ the skills I used to survive this system, and I shudder and stammer when I think of the overall quality of my teaching. At the same time – and it was a school of extremes, from passion to punishment – I navigated a drama experience for them, and they were exposed to a different way of learning. For some it made a difference.

4. Now

As you
mature,
you see
things
a
little
bit
differently.

◆◆◆

Now, I'm more confident to just play.

◆◆◆

1.

Now, I tend to pull back and go home. I think I'm a better teacher, because there's more distance.

◆◆◆

After Sydney and all those experiences, I went through a late twenties thing – about what I wanted from life, and the way I viewed myself in the world, and what life was about. A few things happened at the time, death and things like that, and I really thought about the quality of life that I wanted. Some of those drama terms, like living in the moment, playing in the moment, began to impact on me and my life at that time. It was a bit of a self change there, in the way I thought about my life.

◆◆◆

Before I used to think:

Oh, well

*they'd better like it,
or
I'd better put them with their friends,*

*(if they
don't
like
it
they won't come
back to drama)*

those sorts of things.

Now I'm more
confident,
and when the kids
challenge that
now
I have
the answers
for them.

I don't feel like
I've
failed
if it doesn't
work.

♦ ♦ ♦

I don't tend to be as close to the students any more. When I first started out, and because there was only about three or four years' age difference between us, I tended to let them be my friends and all that sort of stuff. I'm not removed now by any means, but I'm probably not as familiar either, which is a good thing.

♦ ♦ ♦

With maturity, you feel more comfortable with yourself. I remember when I first started, I was so worried about what I was saying, and whether I was saying the right thing, and how I was coming across. Now, I tend to just fall in a pattern, and I'm probably not doing all this internal *What am I like? How am I going?* I can be more external, and I can share things with them. Today,

for example, I said: “My father-in-law died today.” I would never have shared that with my students before. So with that maturity, you’re more confident about sharing your life with them, and that creates better teaching.

The other thing I also do now is join in with them a lot more. There’s one class now where we team teach, and if the other teacher is leading the class, then I’ll actually do the activity and be one of the students. I also model now much more I ever did before. I realise now how valuable that is, and how comfortable that makes the students feel. I actually don’t feel uncomfortable doing it. I’ll join in the improvisation with them, or I’ll perform the monologue, or I’ll do whatever. I think that’s really important, because we’re teaching in the humanities area, and because we ask the students to do it all the time. Teachers just sit there and don’t do it, they don’t involve themselves, and I think that I’ve seen definite improvement with the students because I’ve started joining in. Maybe I just think I have. You only have to do a few things and they think: *Oh, that’s how it’s done. I get what you mean.* It’s good to put yourself in those positions, because there’s a lot that we forget.

♦ ♦ ♦

I used to:
spend hours rehearsing things.

I don’t do that now.

I never used to
quite get it
up to the standard I wanted.

I used to
want it to be
perfect –

and it was never going to be perfect.

I used to
want it to be
super streamlined –

and some of the kids were never going to learn their lines.

the actual play

and it didn't really
matter at the end, because
it's more about
the experience, than

(and mum
and dad
will like them anyway).

♦ ♦ ♦

When you start out, you're so busy just getting your ideas together and getting your instructions together, so busy with the actual grind of it, that often you miss the detail. Now I'm not so afraid of it not working out. I don't feel like I have to be 'the teacher' and know it all.

Now I use my life more, and I'm more confident to do that. It doesn't have to be all pushed and controlled and rehearsed and refined. I don't have to be doing that all the time. You watch other teachers fall on rocky ground too, and that's sad. There was somebody today that had to take time off because of stress, and I don't want to do that. I don't want to be there.

♦ ♦ ♦

I don't believe in fate or any of those sort of things, I think you create your own destiny, but I believe in symbols and I believe that things happen for a reason. There are moments where you can clue in to those symbols – something might happen, somebody might say something, you might see something. I'm a great believer in taking in those sorts of things, in order to construct my own reality.

♦ ♦ ♦

My trips to Asia over the last four years or so have really aided in my growth. After you see the way people live in Cambodia, it makes you more human. I suppose this is what I'm talking about – travelling there just gives you a bigger world picture I think. Some people can have a bigger world picture

✿

and never move on, but going to those places and seeing what they have, and then seeing what we have, really makes you appreciate things.

I suppose there's something significant in those experiences – I'm not sure what it is though. I think it's just part of self and the way I see myself in the world. Maybe I'm more compassionate, and more willing to let go of things that I wasn't before. In my personal life I feel more confident, so I'm able to let things go. Maybe I do that in the classroom as well – let things go. Maybe I don't angst over that directing moment any more, because it doesn't matter any more, because it's only here and it's only this dot in the world.

I suppose it gives you that perspective, and makes you a bit freer in the way you think. I'm probably also more open with the students, realising what sort of life they could have had. My great grandfather came from Canton, he was a miner, and he came out to Australia to be a tin miner in the 1870s, or whenever all the miners came out. If not for that I could have been a student living in Guangzhou, which would be a terrible place to live – I'd probably be down the river living in a shed. Those sorts of experiences, of setting yourself in the world and setting yourself against that perspective is interesting. We do that in drama – we're always saying: "Okay you're a convict", positioning a kid in the world in order to increase their understanding.

I suppose that's what was significant about those experiences. That's what we do – we ask students all the time to play another role, and to look at things from another angle, we're constantly pushing that. Those experiences would only help me to do that as well.

♦♦♦

2.

If drama's about making meaning of the world, then the person who is structuring that meaning for the students has to impact somewhere, don't they,

even if it's not a conscious thing. Perhaps it can only come out within a drama, or within a moment, or within an experience that we have.

◆◆◆

I think the symbol of teaching is something to do with water. It's ever changing, it's fluid, and that's the way I see myself as a teacher – I don't really think there's an end point. I don't think I have the ability to overly analyse that.

◆◆◆

I'm not necessarily happier, but I'm probably a more relaxed person now than I was then. I was quite shy to begin with, and of course drama's all about masks and performance, so you can carry that through. You can get away with it because it's not you up there, is it? It's your character. When I was in Sydney I tended to probably have a mask and a barrier, like *Batfink*: "My wings are like a shield of steel." I carried that through when I came back, so I had to have a rethink about that. It's much nicer to be more open and be more frank with the students, and I think the quality of the work has improved. But then anything's better with experience and time – you work out what works and what doesn't. So I'm not necessarily sure about this.

◆◆◆

You have to
protect
yourself
to a certain extent.

You can't be
completely open
and honest

can you?

But that fits
with what we
were saying
before –

*(being more able to talk about yourself and
do those things)*

that's gradual.

But yeah
we all
play roles,
and we all
have
things
to
protect

don't we?

I mean
you don't
totally
let your guard
down

do you?

◆◆◆

I'm more confident than I was when I started teaching. Particularly because of the level I'm working at, I'm more confident to talk about my stories I think – more able to talk about my own experiences too. I think because I went through the whole Sydney thing, where I was so busy protecting myself and getting through the day and not breaking down in tears, or not showing that I was angry the moment I lost my cool, I had all this defence stuff. It takes a while for that to come back down.

I would never have done this a few years ago – talked about myself like this. Before for me it used to be like: *Oh, I wonder what they'll think of me*, particularly when I was younger. As we said, I was quite shy. Now I'm more able to reflect on my life, and it doesn't matter so much any more if I tell people about myself. So that ability, to reflect and talk about myself and think about myself, is really important. We ask students to do that all the time, but we never do that. We don't often offer a lot of ourselves in the classroom.

◆◆◆

I see teaching as a lifelong journey, and hopefully I'll always see it that way. I can't really pinpoint myself though, in terms of where I see myself. It's hard to talk about where you see yourself now. In two years I could talk about where I was then, but I'm not really good at reflection. But I do see it as a journey, and a process. It's obviously something I enjoy. I certainly have a loyalty to it, and I like to think that as a teacher I'm fairly flexible, fairly fluid – there's the idea of water again. I don't really know where it'll go, but it's an interesting journey.

◆◆◆

I have a fairly good relationship with the students. I'm able to do that, and I don't necessarily think that'll go away with age. People say: "It's because you're young, and you're working in that college system", but I don't agree with that. I know a 62 year old drama teacher, and he has wonderful relationships with the students, so it's not an age based thing. It's about being able to use your personality. I think that's a strength of any drama teacher though – being able to use your personality.

◆◆◆

I've got to do this now
for at least another
2
0
years
and I think
it's the
only
thing
I can do.

So there's got to be
longevity
and distance
there.

There's only a

couple of people
 from my year
 who are still in the classroom –
 most of them have
 shifted on.

*(You can count the amount of drama teachers who have been doing it
 for over fifteen years in northern Tasmania on the one hand almost – you can
 name them.)*

I don't want to give it away
 I don't want to give the drama side of it away
 I don't think I could teach all drama –
 (I don't think I could go back to that Sydney experience)
 but I want some sort of longevity there with it
 because I believe in it –
 and it's important to who I am
 and it's important to my makeup.

♦ ♦ ♦

3.

Education doesn't work unless the personalities are there to make it work. It's
 about human resources, isn't it? It's not about anything else.

♦ ♦ ♦

I always wanted to belong to 'the tribe', or 'the mob'. I like that deep
 connection to the group, and I think it's sad that we lose that. I like living in a
 small suburb for that reason, because there's a real sense of community – next
 door is the uni student, and over the road is the old couple, and you know the
 guy at the shop, and everybody else does as well. That real closeness is
 something that you don't get in other places.

I think you choose those things – where you live, what you do – according to
 what you want. For me, that goes right back to where I was born.

♦ ♦ ♦

You align yourself in life to people that you're like, don't you?

The most recent experience like that for me was the arrival of Michael Green at Southlands. It's really interesting because we've been friends for a long time, and we're so similar in our teaching approach and our methodology, so it's really nice having him there. Today I was actually listening to his class and I was thinking: *Yeah, I do that and I say that*, whereas with my colleagues before, although they were really good and very supportive, we had completely different approaches. Michael and I have the same idea of workshop, so it's really good to feel supported with that approach, because that's something I haven't had in the drama area before.

I feel more enthusiastic. I need to be careful what I say, because it was fine before, but I feel like it's had a bit of an adrenaline shot, and I'm more enthusiastic to do the competitions and things like that. Before, it was just me organising the plays, and I'd only do four or five, but with another person there who is so energetic, you think: *This will be more enjoyable, and more dynamic*. We've also got quite a large department there now, because we've got two Theatre Performance¹ classes, and two Stage 5 Drama classes, and quite a large Stage 4 class which I team teach. That's the biggest number they've ever had there in drama, and that's quite big as far as numbers generally. We've increased something like 40%, and this year we had the biggest increase in enrolments in the whole school.



Once you start getting to know the students, and once you start thinking about their life experience to that point, you really wonder about the world and what we do. I think it's tougher for the students now than it ever has been before. They're so well informed, that they can't even change their minds any more. Now they have to make a decision, and if they make the decision to go to

¹ Along with the Stage 1-5 Drama syllabuses described earlier, there are several specialised pre-tertiary drama courses available to college (Grades 11 and 12) students in Tasmania. These include Theatre Production (dealing with the technical, 'backstage' aspects of drama), and Theatre Performance (a course which involves a series of performances, and less 'process'-based coursework).

university it's all about the fees and the money and the lack of job security, and so they have to make the right decision. Their education also has to be much broader than before, because not many people stay in the one job all their lives, and certainly not many stay in the one place.

I think the school needs to cater for all those sorts of things, before we even begin to teach them. That's the beauty of drama, because you *can* cater for that, and you *can* cater for their needs – particularly when you get to know them.



I don't really think that I was ever meant to work in a structured system. I think I sort of dreamed up the persona – my life path might have been something creative, but I just fitted into that slot. I find working in the education system difficult, not that I'm disorganised or anything, but I find the structure of a school system challenging. That's the thing I get most annoyed with too – actually working within a structure, and working within the pettiness of that.



There was a student in one of my classes last year, and she was quite bright, very cluey, and did really well in her other subjects. She was also quite naïve, almost like a little hippy child from the 60s, quite naïve and quite open, she came from the country. She had obviously come from a loving, supportive, worldly background – she used to carry around a little teddy bear, and she had a very wide-eyed romantic vision of the world, which I suppose a lot of girls at that age have. I gave her group the play *Swallowing is a Very Private Thing* – which deals with abuse and domestic violence and all of that, and I saw her actually undertake this great transformation playing Sharon, the protagonist of the piece. It was a really big risk to take – to play against type – and I didn't know whether she would be able to do that. But the empathy and the insight that this girl brought to the character was absolutely

fascinating, in playing a character that was so far removed from her world. I'm sure within her something shifted.

Afterwards she said: "I never thought I'd be able to do that. When you first gave me the play, I was so confused. I thought you didn't like me, giving me that role." To see her work at that, and work through that, was to watch someone go through not only an intellectual process, but a really emotional process as well. Her group even chose the strongest part of the play – the domestic violence scene – to re-enact. She was there, and she was in the character, and I fundamentally believed her. She made it so real. She brought it to life and she even looked different. She looked older – it was really quite haunting. I've seen that transformation happen a few times.

I've also seen some wonderful things as far as empathy goes with regard to special needs students. I've seen other students actually put themselves down, or play lower status roles, in order to save the special needs students from an embarrassing drama moment where they might have stuffed up or the wrong thing's happened. I've seen that a few times. That's always fairly heart-warming, that human experience. I saw it with a boy this year – quite a big, strapping lad, who put himself down and made himself the butt of jokes in order to save the skin of another kid, who had stuffed up in the improvisation. Those sorts of things are really interesting, and I don't know if they would happen so much in a competitive environment, or if they happen in other subjects where students work individually, rather than working collectively.

Once you belong to the mob, the tribe, they're the sorts of things that you do. You see those things all the time.



In terms of how I teach, I think that more of the creative being has come into play over the years. I'm probably more confident with that now, but then at the same time, that's manipulated and squashed and structured according to the education system. It's a dual-edged sword if you like, so in

one way you have these creative beings, but then they're working in a really structured, manufactured system.

The two don't quite meet, because one involves that freedom and imaginative being – not that in drama you just float around the room – and then the school system doesn't. You have to be logical and you can't be overly emotional and everything's got to be thought through. So there's two things there, two opposing forces if you like, working against each other.

◆◆◆

Without being
pessimistic –
life's a
solo
journey,
and I think
by teaching
and particularly teaching
drama,
then it
doesn't have to
be
like
that.

Somebody else goes on
the journey
with you
so it's a way of feeling
less insecure
too, because
somebody
else is going on
your journey
with you.

If you want to get
deep about human nature
it offers that sort of
outlet
(*don't you think?*).

5. Interlude: The navigator (Part 2)

If a student is having an intellectual, emotional experience, how can you interfere with that?

Navigating an experience is what we tend to do in drama. You are teaching them specific skills, but what you're really doing is charting a course for them, aren't you? You're setting up situations that they can explore freely – you're not moving in and saying, "No, you can't do that at that particular moment." I don't think any other learning does that. We let people have the freedom to explore, and I suppose the idea of exploring relates to navigating.

You can't control it. You can't control the outcome of a drama – you can step in as a teacher, and you can change a point, or you can move it this way or you can move it forwards or back, but you can't actually control that student's experience. You can only plot it in some way, and then leave the experience up to them.

6. Always

We are always in the process of revising ourselves. (Fox, 1996, p. 332)

♦ ♦ ♦

I'm not really strong with my convictions. I suppose it's because of the area I work in – I'm never really sure about things. I'm not a flaky sort of person, I'm fairly solid and I don't move all over the place with my fundamental beliefs and ideas, but I do change a lot. I never get into strong arguments, totally convinced that I know the one way. I'm not really one of those people who are just black and white with things, I'm very much shades of

grey. It's fluid. I'm not saying that's a great thing to be, but I just tend to go with the flow a little bit.

I'm never really sure about things. I can't dismiss an idea or a concept, or any of those sorts of things, out and out. I tend to go along with it, and never really find firm ground, but I think that's the creative approach to things.



I've brought in this map, which was something that I developed when I was in my third year at university. It was a really important thing, so my friend and I did this, we made this map and we used it as a storytelling piece. I don't know if they still do this, if you do it out here at the uni any more, but we used it a lot. We'd pass it around the room, and the students would make up the place. You'd ask them things, like why the map was torn, what happened to it, what the red marks on it were, and so on. So we used it as a starting point for different sorts of dramas, and I thought that was really interesting. I chose that because it's one of the only things that I've actually kept, and still use. I think what I do with the students has actually changed a lot since that time. I was cleaning out my stuff the other day, and found all these resources that I've kept from years ago that I just don't use now.

You keep them
and keep them
in
a
box

for
years
and you
never
go back to them.

You think
you're going to
but you find new books.

Things

evolve
and
change.

11.

(un)Final(izable) conversations

The narratives people tell do not necessarily have clear resolutions. Endings or “conclusions” that resolve problems or complications are standard components of Western narrative, but they are not necessarily characteristic of stories meant to evoke emotion and spur political commitment and action. Instead of having end points, such narratives describe situations as portions of complex journeys that continue to unfold. Their incompleteness and contingency is critical to their meaning. (Nespor and Barber, 1995, p. 60)

1. Beginnings (Part 3)

The polyphonic concept of “unfinalizability” seemed very powerful to me in the sense that I did not ever feel forced to reduce the findings to final resolution or clarity – or steer them into fixed categories... what mattered more was the dialogue between characters and, in some cases, between two sides to one person. (Tanaka, 1997, p. 290)

Unfinalizability.

Only now, at the ‘end’, do I understand what this word means. At the beginning, it didn’t occur to me. On the journey, it called to me from time to time. But now, looking back at where we have been, what we have said, this word is my memory – more than anything else. Identity is never finished. Memory is never complete. While the stories of the six teachers just shared may be fixed in form, they are not fixed in meaning. Research suggests – or demands, or persuades – but does not ‘conclude’, fixing interpretation and action. As far as central themes or qualitative controls go, unfinalizability is the strongest yet.

Incompleteness.

Maxine Greene (1995) suggests that it is “incompleteness – the open question, perhaps – that summons us to the tasks of knowledge and action” (p. 74). As in any conversation, the last words are just the starting points for somewhere else to go. And where should we go now?

And still, *this is my story, but it is not my story.*

*It is a story composed
of fragments
of memories
of knowing
of asking*
—

This is a story made up of questions that answer in questions.

Ask again.

The question is
the story itself,

And whether
or not
it means something
is not
for the story to tell. (Auster, 1987, p. 3)¹

What happens next?

*Is this the beginning of
the
end,*

*or just the end
of the
beginning?*

For a long time, the thought of writing this final chapter troubled me. Even now, I am unsure of exactly what purpose it should serve. Is it simply to fulfil the obligations of an academic thesis, which “requires reducing findings to fixed categories” (Tanaka, 1997, p. 289)? But how do we conclude or resolve

¹ Line breaks added.

a conversation? On the other hand, if my purpose is, as I have said earlier, to *raise* questions about what it might mean to be a ‘teacher’ and what it might mean to conduct ‘research’, have these questions not already been raised? But even in conversations, we might arrive at temporary meaning. Not closure, by any means, but moments of connection, where we reformulate our positions, locate where we are speaking from, and then begin again. Perhaps that is what I might attempt to do now – reformulate, take stock, in order to begin again. In this sense, I would like to end where I began – by looking across. Out of my own experiences, to the experiences of others. And unlike Tanaka in the quote that began this section, there are certain persistent themes that I *do* feel it might be important to revisit – the interaction between memory and narrative, the concept of professional identity, the culture of drama teaching, and the potential usefulness or benefit of research that aims to disorient and persuade, rather than predict and control.

While such a moment of pause in the developing dialogue may be useful, there are complications. For example, who should speak in this final chapter? Should I do so in my own voice? I have attempted to give over considerable textual space in this thesis in order to develop a kind of polyphonic conversation – one which privileges the rhythm of combined voices and fragments. As Bakhtin (1981) notes, in polyphonic writing, “the important thing is the final dialogicality, i.e. the dialogical nature of the total work” (p. 14). What purpose would there be in developing or listening to these voices, only to mute them now?

With a touch of irony, then, I note that I am again in the position of experiencing tension, between the need for precision and the productive nature of ambiguity. To address these concerns, while still allowing the space for a textual pause – the ending of this text, if not necessarily this conversation – I have decided to take quite literally the notion of the polyphonic text as a dialogue between equal voices. In what follows, I have drawn upon, first, final conversations with each of the participants, where they shared their reactions to the life stories and their questions and concerns about the research process, and second, my own ‘final’ comments about what I have learned and

unlearned in my interactions with these six people. In this way, I hope to respect my fundamental purpose, express the unfinalizability of the issues explored, and still guide the interpretation and temper the ambiguity of this text.

We are again playing in the margins of meaning.

2. (un)Final(izable) conversations

Michael: It is a real reflection of where I was at that particular time. I was drawing on a lot of positive and not so positive experiences, and so I think we were really lucky that it was then, and not 18 months earlier, because I think for me it was a lot richer. That's a positive thing that I draw out of it, because it was at a time when I was really evaluating what I was doing and where I was at.

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Molly: When I read it, I was thinking: *Oh, I know this person*. It was like me, but it's not. There's a distance to it, and it becomes somebody's interpretation – with the way you've structured it, it became your interpretation of the significant events in my life. It became almost like a short story as such, so there was this closeness to it, but there's a distance too, because of the way it's been constructed.

There's a couple of moments in there, particularly a couple of the anecdotes that I hadn't really thought about a lot, that were actually quite significant moments, and really fit well within the piece. I found some of those sorts of things relevant, although probably not so much the Sydney material. I've had time to reflect on that, and it's all that sort of good/bad stuff, and stuff that I consolidated on, but certainly the later memories, like the stuff that's been happening more at Southlands College, I saw an evolution in how I taught and how I think now compared to then, because there has been that distance of

time. The Sydney stuff was: *Oh yeah, that's right*, but the more recent stuff was interesting.

Tim: That's really interesting, that idea that your memories from a while ago are actually quite clear, it's almost like you're comfortable with that story. I feel the same about my own life – I can talk about events of four or five years ago and I know what they mean to me and I know where they came from, but the last year or so, it's all still up in the air really.

Molly: I agree completely, and I feel like that at the moment. You must analyse and think it through and compartmentalise it, and you put it somewhere, and now when I think about that time in Sydney, it's almost like it's somebody else, I'm not emotionally connected to it any more. When I talk about my work in Sydney, I think about the people I was with, and the actual environment, those friendships or whatever, but they're gone and past, and are just Christmas cards and phone calls occasionally, so I don't have that emotional attachment, but the more recent stuff I do. Particularly when it's an anecdote, I start thinking about that kid, and what that kid's doing, so I have that human response to it more. I think reflection takes a long time, it takes a period of years.

♦ ♦ ♦

The most difficult point to understand or describe in the story of who I am, and what has happened to me, is now. Maybe it is hard to interpret the present because it isn't clear what will come of it. Until I know where I will be tomorrow, I cannot tell you what was important in terms of getting there. I need a larger structure, a context.

One voice that I would like to add to the conversation at this point is that of Denzin (1989), who describes the relationship between memory and narrative in a way that resonates with my experiences in this research. He writes:

Lives and experiences are represented in stories. They are like pictures that have been painted over, and, when paint is scraped off an old picture, something new becomes visible. What is new is what was previously covered up. A life and the stories about it have the qualities of pentimento. Something new is always coming into sight, displacing what was previously certain and seen. There is no truth in the painting of a life, only multiple images and traces of what has been, what could have been, and what is now. (p. 81)

Here, perhaps, is one of the significant limitations of my study. To what extent is this understanding of the dynamic, unfinalizable process of remembering and describing our experience actually represented within the life stories constructed for this text? How much is lost in order to create a text that is intelligible and acceptable within the borders of the thesis genre? To some extent, even the fact that these stories have been altered from the original, spoken format to become text on a page gives them a degree of permanence that was not inherent in their telling. Indeed, I have allowed the textual space for only one version of each participant's life – which may give the impression that this is *the* story of John Martin, for example, rather than *a* story of him. Also, I have removed a great deal of information from each person's story as shared with me – the one-off experiences that didn't fit within one of the themes used to give direction and structure in the final text, and the minor contradictions that would obscure rather than illuminate the participants' experiences. I am troubled, then, by the permanence and coherence of the stories – the sense that they exist out of time, and out of context.

To some extent, one way of counteracting this tendency towards permanence and certainty was to re-interview the participants after I had written the life story narratives – a 'gap' of up to six months. Given the distance of time and context, a number of participants made comments to suggest that while they identified with these stories as an interpretation of who they *had* been at the

time of the interviews, they were not this person any more. But what of other readers – those who cannot interpret these stories knowing how the tellers have since changed, and who they are now? I wonder, then, if there may be other, non-textual forms of representation better suited for displaying human experience and understanding as temporal and temporary, or even other ways of expressing this textually – by presenting multiple versions of the same person’s story within one text, for instance. In other words, I wonder if I could have taken these stories further – done more to unsettle and challenge straightforward readings of them.

What has been, what could have been, what is now. The present is incomplete. Our lives, and the meanings we draw from them, are unfinalizable. In the act of looking back, “I find myself seeing past experiences in new ways – and I realise what it means to say that I have lived one possible life among many” (Greene, 1995, p. 77).

The first thing that I have learned from this work is that my life is a story always told and retold in past tense.



John: First impression, when I stand back from a work of art, and say: “Well, black and white – do I like it or don’t I like it?” – I like it. And it’s quite funny because I’ve never read about myself. I was fascinated by it, because when you look in a mirror of words, and read...

I like it. I’m not saying I like *me*, but I like what you have done with the material you had. I thought you had it pretty right, which to me is up there in the ultimate compliment department, insofar as I see myself as quite dedicated, and quite professional, and very thoughtful, too thoughtful for a lot of my mates. And yes I am restless. I got the impression through here that restless can be a bad thing, and to me it’s more that I’m missing adventure. And restless can sometimes mean unsettled, and I’m not unsettled. I wouldn’t say unsettled, and this is

the beautiful thing about language, it's how do you say it? I'm not restless, but I'm certainly in need of an adventure fix.

I have no direct right to say this, but it seems that you're doing a bit of soul-searching too, about who you are, where you are, what you bring to a drama class. When I read it the second time, most interestingly I was thinking: *What are you getting at, and what are you getting from this?* You're looking at me as a drama practitioner, and saying John Martin goes out and brings to the drama class life experiences – he can bring in emotional memory, he can bring in adventure memory. But you look at it, and yourself, from a professional level, a social level, a personal level, a mind-growing level, and all that. You're sorting yourself out, from looking at my life in a way, and what we might have in common and what we don't. There's a lot going on here for Tim Moss...



There is a knock at my office door, jolting me away from the computer screen. It is Sonya, one of our fourth year undergraduate students. She has an official form in her hand. She tells me that it needs to be completed so that she can apply for teacher registration. The problem is, a teacher needs to witness and sign all of her documents, and she is related to everyone she could ask. Would I mind signing for her as a teacher? I hesitate, pen in hand. I wonder if my experience in teacher education counts, as far as the Teacher Registration Board are concerned. I wonder if they will send the form back. The old questions, still unresolved.

Along this journey, I have heard others ask the same questions. I have heard them answer, and I have heard them ask again. I have heard that the stories we tell to describe ourselves are always open, always tenuous. Unfinalizable. There is no simple correspondence between self and memory. Rather, there is dialogue – between self, experience, memory, and context. Being a teacher, it seems, is not something that is handed to me with my degree. It is not an

object, that once acquired, will always be mine. Nor is it something that can be separated, or extracted from who I am as a person. Rather, it is one voice in this dialogue. I am a teacher, just as I am a son, a brother, and so on. Sometimes I may be more of a teacher, sometimes less. How productive is it to even separate this part of who I am, to look at it in any isolated way?

As a result of my work with these six drama teachers, I would like to suggest that there may also be a third perspective of professional identity that operates alongside the first two that I described earlier in this text. In this third view, there is no divide between that which is ‘personal’, and that which is ‘professional’. The problem in establishing such a divide is that it draws upon particular notions of what a ‘personal’ self might be – and often, these are notions of personal self as an essentialised ‘substance’. If, as Buttignol (2000) says, “The teacher self always needs to be informed by the personal self” (p. 368), then the personal self must be *outside* of my experiences as a teacher. In other words, Buttignol assumes (as I did) that there is a personal self to act as an ‘anchor’, against which we can maintain a stable – but separate – teaching self. But what if our experiences in a professional environment move the anchor, reshape it?

If, on the other hand, we view the personal self as a narrative construction that exists in dialogue with all of the varied experiences of our lives, then the relationship between personal and professional is much closer – our teaching experiences are *part* of our personal identity. Nias (1993) writes that for many teachers, “personal and professional identity have become fused; the teacher is the person, and an important part of the person is the teacher” (p. 154). Without being a teacher, then, I would no longer be ‘me’ in the way that I know myself now – because being a teacher is just as important to my personal identity as being a male, or a son, or a friend.

According to this perspective, then, professional identity is part of the larger identity of ‘me’. It is not a question of how much I want to ‘invest’ in teaching – I may as well ask how much I want to invest in being a male or a son. It is impossible to separate who we are as people from who we are as

teachers – in much the same way that Clandinin and Connelly (1994) say that the psychologist Sarason’s autobiography makes the following point:

His life as psychologist and his life at large are intertwined. It is not that he fails to make a distinction between his job as a psychologist and the rest of his life. Rather, it is impossible to separate them in practice. He is a human being as a psychologist and he is a psychologist as a human being. (p. 415)

While this view of identity would most likely not describe how all teachers see themselves, it is to me at least as plausible as the first two perspectives I described earlier – as a possibility. And indeed, it seems that this view of what a teacher ‘is’ and can be resonates with the voices of a number of those who speak as, or about, drama teachers. Ross (1996), for example, writes of the drama teacher: “Above all she will be fully present in the occasion. She will not present a pseudo-self to her pupils, nor accept pseudo-drama from them” (p. 53).

At this point, I would like to reiterate that I don’t think any discussion of a concept such as professional identity can be reduced to statements of which view is right or wrong. After all, it may be the case here that they are *all* right. For some teachers, the role may be more desirable than the identity. Some teachers may subscribe more to the second story of professional identity – they are more or less teachers, more or less people. There may also be some teachers for whom it is impossible to describe where the ‘teacher’ ends and the ‘person’ begins. On the other hand, there may be people who are all of these things, and there may be people who are none. It all depends on when you ask, and where they are.

If – as I have suggested above – the end of a conversation is potentially a new beginning, there are many opportunities for new research beginnings here. For example – what happens to our stories of identity over time? What might Emily say about what it means to be a teacher in five years? In ten?

If my professional identity is as much a part of my personal identity as being a son or a brother is, what happens to that personal identity when I no longer teach? What kind of stories of being a teacher might a retired teacher offer, or a teacher who did not recover, as Molly did, from feeling ‘burnt out’?

What influence does the actual subject matter being taught have upon a teacher’s stories of identity? Are the issues raised here about investment and the role teaching plays in the development of a person in very broad terms unique to drama teachers? If so, what stories of identity would music teachers tell, or maths teachers, or primary school teachers?

The second thing I have learned from this work is that identity is an ongoing, unanswered question – an incomplete story. So, it seems, is research.

I sign Sonya’s form.

♦ ♦ ♦

Sarah: When I was reading it, at first it felt really strange, but as it went on, I liked what you’d done with it – the different shapes on the page, and that sort of thing. It was good, I liked it, and I thought if I was going to write this, I’d want to be able to write it in this sort of way. I thought these poetic bits were great, it showed that you understood where I was coming from.

I always feel very self-conscious about the first section, because my early stuff doesn’t come into the picture any more, so it was like: *I’m glad this is anonymous*. But I don’t know, I mean I’ve definitely learned from this whole process. I think you really picked up – with the emphasising and that kind of thing, and the story about the maths teacher in grade 10, the silly old bag – you picked up that sort of thing really well.

Tim: I wasn’t sure about that, to be honest.

Sarah: I think it's good, I like it. I was laughing at that kind of thing, because I mean personally, that's fully where I'm coming from.

Tim: And I don't think anyone would be upset or offended to read that.

Sarah: Hopefully not, but I mean it's all anonymous anyway. I'm not really worried that people will recognise this, because I don't usually go out and say this kind of thing to many people, so it wouldn't really be an issue. People wouldn't expect it of me; I don't have an issue with it at all.

♦ ♦ ♦

Early in this research text, I shared my initial questions, and the research question which has framed this entire project. I asked about drama teachers' experiences and identities – both of which I have since learned cannot be described in any simple or universal fashion, given that we are continually adding new experiences to the stories of who we are, and how we are. I have described here the ways in which I have come to see the intersections between experience and identity, and the difficulties in trying to view one of these concepts without the other. For now, these are the best 'answers' to this question I am able to draw together. These are answers that will, I hope, generate new questions and possibilities.

But there is one further aspect of my research question which I am yet to address. That is, how these six teachers understand and describe a culture of drama teaching. Might they see the subject of drama as unique, as I had earlier assumed it to be? Is there even anything as clearly definable as a 'culture' of drama teaching? Once again, I have no answers – or, perhaps I should say, no conclusions. The ways in which these teachers interact with and conceptualise what it is they teach seem to vary as much as the voices with which they speak.

The culture of drama teaching, if I can even speak of such a thing, is itself shifting and temporal. Through one lens, the participants seem to describe it as a culture of dissonances, conflicts, contradictory meanings and possibilities. After all, a drama teacher must be “both artist *and* teacher, creative *and* authoritarian, subversive *and* part of the establishment” (Winston, 1998, p. 52). In this way, perhaps drama teaching (if not arts teaching more broadly) *is* unique – in that it demands that teachers meet not only educational objectives and expectations, but also aesthetic and dramatic objectives and expectations. Different teachers, it seems, deal with this interaction between the artistic and the educational in different ways. I think of Michael, for whom teaching on its own does not provide enough in the way of artistic fulfilment, while acting on its own does not provide enough in the way of personal and professional fulfilment. In the story he tells in this text, the roles of actor and teacher are not the same in terms of their rewards – nor can they be merged. More troubling is that while this may mean drama teaching provides unique artistic and educational rewards, it also provides unique tensions and pressures. I think of Anna, twice caught in the contradictory position of having to fight to earn validity for drama *processes* by showcasing drama *products* – and thus undermining the very processes she values and wishes to promote.

Through another lens, though, the participants describe significant unities and connections within the culture of drama teaching – between people, and between places. I think of Molly, who talks about rejecting the identity of actor, because other actors weren’t ‘like’ her, but accepting drama teaching in Tasmania because of the collective experience it provides for her. In her words, perhaps we choose the things that will to some extent define us – our homes, our jobs – based on what we want. If, like Molly, it is a deep connection and closeness to others that we want, teaching drama – at least, in Tasmania – does seem capable of providing this. Indeed, the six teachers whose stories are told through this text have shared connections and interactions that are far richer and more complex than could be explained through the shared contexts of Paterson College or Frankland High. Emily’s story of arriving at Paterson College is not, to me, a story about starting in a

new school – rather, it is a story of finding one’s place within a community. Similarly, with Michael’s departure several years later, Emily talks about the absence of the ‘team’, in much the same way as she talks about the absence of Michael himself.

These teachers, it seems, describe a culture made up of people connecting with other people, rather than professionals working together only on a professional level. In this sense, Emily’s comments about the subject matter that drama teachers must address, and the demands this places on them as human beings, seem to have resonance. If, as she suggests, drama teachers do share what they know, where they have been, and the meanings of their experiences, does this influence the way they interact with each other, as well as with their students? Does it allow them to reflect on, and thus come to know, others’ selves, as well as their own? Anna talks about her experiences with other drama teachers who were either emotionally ‘strong’ or emotionally ‘weak’, and I cannot help but wonder whether emotional strength would even be a concern for teachers in other subject areas. Also, I wonder about how this sense of community and personal connection might apply in other contexts. After all, John, Molly, and Anna all returned to Tasmania at various points in their lives, because of the sense of community and safety . they felt here.

The third thing that I learned through this research is that I cannot reduce the meanings of teaching drama in the lives of these six individuals to a description of a unified ‘culture’ of drama teaching, any more than I can resolve the questions raised above. If there is a culture of drama teaching in Tasmania, it is one of irresolvable tensions – between the demands of the artist and the demands of the teacher. At the same time, it is a culture of shifting unities and connections – between people and places. Perhaps this divided, unresolved description is as it should be – for as Winston (1998) reminds us, “drama is essentially *about* irresolvable struggles” (p. 52).



Anna: My first response to the work was that there was so much writing, which means there was so much talking on my part, which I found really disconcerting, and really embarrassing. But then I read through it, and the speech isn't waffle, what it's about is actually quite concise, and there are quite a few examples used. I found it quite interesting reading, because I suppose there's that distance between when we discussed it, and when I actually read it now, the distance has allowed me to read it almost as reading another person's work. Sometimes what comes out of your mouth is not what you actually think, so it was really interesting reading it from that point of view, because often I thought: *I did say that, and it is what I meant*, whereas there were a couple of times where I thought: *No, that's not what I meant*. I just wanted to make sure I was interpreting it correctly.

Teachers do become very emotionally attached to the end result, so your maths teacher gets very emotionally bound up in how their children are going to do in the maths competition, or whatever the case may be, because a good teacher is emotionally bound up in the process. So I don't think I was taking any journey that was any different to what a lot of other people do. I hope it gets the audience of those people who are starting out or feeling scared and threatened, to actually realise that it is scary and it is hard, but it's worth it.

Initially it was very clear that it's almost like your summary, or your interpretation of, my experiences. And then, as it went on, it became more poetic and so then I was thinking: *Am I interpreting this correctly?* I like the way it's set out because of that – it made me stop and think and go back to it, and it *was* my work. It's your work, but because it's my words, I suppose I feel quite- I just want to look at how people are going to interpret me.

Tim: Oh yes, and I think I have a responsibility to look at that as well.

♦ ♦ ♦

As I have discussed in earlier chapters, one of my primary aims in constructing this research text was to create a format and structure that would effectively facilitate a meaningful, open-ended conversation about what it might mean to be a teacher, and to teach drama. I envisioned this conversation as one in which all parties – researcher, theorists, participants, and readers, had opportunities to contribute, and thus interact with each other. As such, there are a number of voices and perspectives presented throughout this text, particularly in the life stories of (and about) the six teachers. I have created a non-traditional textual format, then, to address a non-traditional research purpose. These statements raise a number of important questions, of which perhaps the most important relate to who might receive such research texts, and how these people might respond. I would like to address these issues now, before this discussion concludes.

The first issue, then, relates to the audience for this text. Who is this research *for*? This is a question that I have asked many times throughout the work, and I have been repeatedly unsatisfied with my own response. First and foremost, my answer is that this text is written ‘to’ an audience of *scholarly peers* (Hatch, 2002, p. 220) – in other words, people like me. Much of the discussion surrounding the participants’ life stories is written for an audience that has prior experience in decoding and interpreting academic discourse. This is evident in the language I have used, the ways in which I have developed and structured my arguments, and it is unlikely a reader will confuse this text with a great (or even average) work of imaginative literature.

Even so, if my primary audience for these sections of the thesis is really defined as people ‘like me’, then these are people who are unsatisfied with certain conventions of traditional theses – conventions such as the use of a third person narrator (Hatch, 2002, p. 221), and such specialised uses of language that other audiences are not just uninvited, they are actively excluded. One of the conventions I was most interested in writing *against* is the notion that “it is often considered enough to complete a study for an exclusive and academic audience” (Tierney, 2000b, p. 185). With this in mind, it has been my hope – my intention, even – to broaden the potential

audience of this text. I didn't want this research to be just another "extractive exercise" (Nespor and Barber, 1995, p. 56), taking from the participants, without also giving something back. In this sense, the intended audience for the life stories was quite deliberately broadened, to include the participants themselves. Indeed, the first readers to actually read and comment on this text were these participants. Insofar as these people are all teachers, it is my hope that by writing to (rather than about) them, I am also writing to any other teachers who may be interested in engaging with the questions and issues raised here.

I hope that this does not sound too naïve or patronising – and at no stage did I consciously alter my writing style or temper my analysis against any notion of what 'teachers' would be comfortable or uncomfortable reading. I simply tried to keep in mind throughout the thesis how I would feel if teachers, participants, or others outside of the academy read what I was writing. As I said above, I am not completely satisfied with my response to the question of who this work is for – I would like it to be for anyone who is interested, but am aware that even in this format, it is unlikely to engage a wider readership. This is one compromise that I feel is unavoidable, within the requirements of an academic thesis, however I choose to conceptualise that genre. Perhaps a more useful way to address this question, suggests Mason (2002, p. 159), is simply to ask: *Who benefits from this work?* In this sense, I believe that researchers, teachers, and perhaps even a wider audience, could potentially benefit from and use this work, although not in the way that they might expect. This leads us into the second issue that I wish to comment on here – how readers might respond to this work.

In research texts that address more traditional purposes and ways of sharing information, the role of the reader in receiving, evaluating, and benefiting from this information is quite clear. As Barone (1990/2000) writes, traditional research is used as a tool, which will tell us how to act more appropriately, and with a greater degree of certainty. He writes:

A text of qualitative inquiry ready for use implies a previous resolution of nettlesome questions, including questions of epistemology and ethics, that might have arisen during its preparation. We might, therefore, be expected merely to imagine appropriate contexts for their application or consumption. We would thus confine our attention to the most obvious sense of use, the one in which the verb rubs elbows with the name of an implement. I use a handkerchief. You use a computer. The educational policy maker uses research findings. (p. 137)

In this sense, texts of educational research are read in the same fashion as instruction manuals. They tell us how to behave, and what the results of our behaviour will be. As such, they rely on assumptions of prediction and control as the ultimate outcomes. The potential benefit to readers from such research texts is judged by their usefulness as blueprints for action. Useful blueprints for action are reliable – that is, “consistent, stable, dependable and predictable... If they are reliable, we can depend on them” (Burns, 1997, p. 259). They are also high in validity – that is, “the test measures what it claims to measure” (Burns, 1997, p. 281). Readers respond to the information presented, assess the reliability and validity of this information, and then either use or reject it. This process requires distanced and sceptical engagement:

The text-as-tool does not prize metaphorical aptness; it offers technical precision. It is not designed to surprise the reader-as-user. Its modes of fashioning are not selected to challenge the common order. As an object of craft rather than art, a tool is fashioned for use within that order, tacitly bestowing legitimacy upon it. (Barone, 1990/2000, p. 147)

How might readers respond, then, to a research text that does not aim to be used in this way? For one thing, criteria of reliability and validity no longer seem relevant. One of the primary attributes of my work is that it is *not* intended to be consistent, stable, or predictable. While I would hope that

other researchers, for example, may find resonances with other drama teachers that they may themselves study, I wouldn't expect that these same life stories would emerge in exactly this format, even if I were to use the same methods with the same teachers, given the temporal and contextual nature of identity. Similarly, the concept of validity does not sit comfortably with my work. Barone and Eisner (1997) have discussed one of the shortcomings of the validity question as it is often posed, and as I have posed it above, in that such a question – about whether our results reflect what it is they are supposed to reflect – relies on a correspondence theory of truth. If this is the case, such a question can never be answered, because “to know whether one's claims about reality correspond to reality would require that someone know the reality to which one's claims correspond” (p. 87). In other words, even if it were possible to assert that our results are valid, such a claim would be self-defeating, indicating that there was no need for this research to be done, because “if someone knew reality, the need for claims about it would be superfluous” (Barone and Eisner, 1997, p. 87). Also, as Kvale (1995/2002) has suggested, “a strong focus on validity in research may foster an emphasis on testing and verification of knowledge rather than on exploration and creative generation of new knowledge” (p. 321). This is a kind of methodological scepticism, whereby all that research reports aim to do is convince readers (themselves often researchers) that they tell the ‘truth’, without questioning taken-for-granted assumptions about what that truth might be, and how.

I have failed in my project if my work operates in this way. Following Bruner (1986, p.12), I would rather readers ask how the experiences described in this text are endowed with meaning, than whether they correspond with what they know of the world. When readers encounter one of the participants' lives, or mine, in the text, I hope that the question they ask will not be “did this happen?”. I would rather readers ask “*could* this happen?”, and then ask what it might mean – to the narrator, to others, and to themselves – if it did. In a sense, then, I am asking readers to respond to these stories in the same way that I did – in terms of what we learn from them, what questions they encourage us to ask. Like Bateson (cited in Tierney, 2000a),

I have not tried to verify these narratives, beyond attending to issues of internal consistency and checking them against my knowledge of the individuals... The accounts are shaped by each person's choice and selective memory... These are stories I have used to think with. (p. 542)

It is my hope, then, that readers will also respond to this text in such a fashion. As such I have tried to offer readers the opportunity to be *fully present* in the dialogue, and to engage with our conversation *in* the present. I have attempted to *allow for*, rather than *specify* (Sparkes, 2002), the kinds of theoretical, practical, aesthetic and emotional questions and answers that each party – researcher, participants, and readers – may take away with them. After all, as Eisner (1997b) has suggested, “What arts-based educational research seeks is not so much conclusions that readers come to believe but the number and quality of the questions that the work raises” (p. 268). What I have to offer are stories to think with, not statements to believe and enact.

The benefit of this approach, then, is in its unfinalizability, its incompleteness – for by calling into question our understandings about the issues being explored, “we call into question the whole process of our knowledge creation and making sense of our worlds, but in a way that continues to honour the experience of those [with] whom we speak” (Reason, 1996, p. 23). By accepting what we know as incomplete, acknowledging that there will always be different ways of knowing and seeing, we have the opportunity to experience an act of educative *transgression* (Barone, personal communication, April 22 2003) – because as Molly put it in an earlier chapter, we learn to ‘let go’ of what we have taken for granted. We allow things to change.

In this way, I believe that we can begin to move towards the goal, as Lather (2003) describes it, of “getting people to no longer know what to do so that things might be done differently” (p. 9). This is a very different notion of what constitutes research benefit and how research should be used, than the

‘text-as-tool’ approach, designed for policymakers, that Barone describes in the quote above. In engaging readers in a different way of responding to research, it may even be possible for different readers to enter into the conversation.

The fourth thing that I have learned through this work is that sometimes asking the right questions is more important than giving the right answers.

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Emily: I would have loved to have read a book about what it is like to be a teacher, because there’s this big void. Everybody knows what a teacher is supposed to be, but teachers themselves don’t seem to have a voice. To be training and to be able to read what it’s like to be a teacher would be great.

Tim: I was also interested to know what your first reaction to the story was.

Emily: Honestly, I got a bit teary. It was revealing, it was interesting. It was like looking in a mirror, and it was a clear mirror, it wasn’t a cloudy one. Everything was very clear. That was good – it was good to see myself, but also to see myself as another entity, because by having a pseudonym, I did become someone else. It was really fascinating, because I did see things about myself, and I thought: Okay, so that’s what is going on. It was like looking at myself and realising that my shirt’s only half tucked in. It’s funny, I really wanted to show it to someone else and say: “Have I been too revealing? Have I said too much?” and I read it once and then put it away and then yesterday I sat down and read it again, and I don’t think I have. I’ve been really honest, but I don’t think I’ve said too much or not said the right things.

◆◆◆

Earlier, I mentioned one further group of readers for this text, who may respond differently to the incompleteness of these life stories, the emphasis on raising questions rather than closing them down. This group is not an abstract conceptualisation of ‘teachers’ or ‘researchers’ or ‘policymakers’. Rather, I know this group well – I know their ways of speaking, their experiences, even their faces. This final group is the participants themselves. How useful has this process, and this text, been for them? How beneficial?

It seems to me that these questions are often left unstated by researchers, in their interactions with those who bring life to their projects. I wonder if this is at least in part, because they don’t want to know the answers. I didn’t. What if the participants were upset or angry with my interpretation of them?

Worse, what if they didn’t understand that these texts were, after all, only interpretations, and that there may be other, equally valid ways of structuring and understanding their lives? What if they read the text looking for answers, rather than questions? And yet, I wanted to know. I wanted to see if research could do more than just extract information from participants. Like Tierney (1998),

I am troubled by the fixed positions in which we find ourselves – the researcher and the researched. Instead of trying to change the subject’s reality, we are supposed to leave it alone; rather than assume we know something – anything – that might improve our respondent’s lives, we are to walk away and work on the narrative underpinnings of our encounters. I again grow uncomfortable. Research ought to do more than merely describe a situation or enable readers to gain partial understanding of alternative narratives. (p. 62)

Because of this uncertainty about the kinds of purposes that research might fulfil in *participants’* lives, I now wish to discuss what happened to the people I worked with throughout this project. In doing so, I am engaging in one final act of transgression – finding out what footprints my journey has left on the lives of the participants. Even as I ask, I wonder if this is transgression in a

negative sense, moving “beyond the border that separates what is acceptable and unacceptable, what is valid and nonvalid, in research” (Oliva, 2000, p. 42). It’s important to note that I don’t ask this question out of a solipsistic or self-indulgent desire to know that I have made a difference. Rather, I do it to raise questions about whether I even have the *right* to ignore or overlook the difference – positive or negative – that my research makes in the lives of participants.

The conversations presented throughout this chapter go some way, I hope, to illustrating how each person has responded to, and sometimes against, our work together. But these conversations have already become the past. Let me introduce the present into this discussion. John Martin no longer lives in Australia – he has moved with his family to an Asian country, where he teaches english (and no drama). Anna White no longer teaches at all, and has moved to another part of the state. Emily Reade is no longer at Paterson College – she now teaches at an all-boys’ high school. Similarly, Molly Hayes no longer teaches at Southlands College, but has moved to a district school, where she teaches drama from Grade 1 through to Grade 10. Sarah Morgan and Michael Green both continue to teach at the schools discussed in their life stories. While it would be extremely presumptuous of me to claim that being involved in this project had anything to do with where these teachers are now, I do wonder. As Emily mentions in the conversation above, she was able to use the research – particularly the life story text – as a way of identifying with her own situation. The ‘mirror of words’, to use John’s phrase, allowed her to see herself more clearly, with more distance. Molly, in an unrecorded conversation, suggested that I offer this approach to reflection to the Department of Education in Tasmania as a form of professional development for teachers. In other words, the participants let me know that the answers people generate in response to the questions we raise have consequences.

I have come to realise, then, that while Tierney (1998), may be uncomfortable with the knowledge that research *ought* to do more than describe, I am uncomfortable in the knowledge that it *does*. We will change our participants’

realities, whether we mean to or not. And ultimately, I can think of no greater reason to undertake research, and no greater reason not to. Asking the right questions has never seemed so important. I just hope that I have done so here – and in the end, whether I have succeeded in this regard is not for me alone to decide.

The fifth thing that I have learned through this work is that some borders are themselves incomplete. Some borders need to be questioned.



Michael: It must be nearly 18 months since we started, and that timeframe was a really good feature of it I think, because it gave me the sense that it wasn't a rushed process at all – that I had time to really sift through the things that I wanted to say, rather than just do it all in one hit. The interesting thing about it is that when we first started this process, it coincidentally came at a time of real change for me. It was a really crucial time, and that comes through strongly in the writing. I'm much more settled now and have more of a focus, and I don't feel as vulnerable or as naïve. I'm stronger and more centred now, and am feeling more so as time goes on, but 18 months ago was a real crossroads for me, a real transition. That struck me when I read this writing – that yes, that had been a pretty important time. This research has been part of the cathartic experience of moving on from that, getting some distance from that transition.

The research phase of it was a learning curve for me, because I've always had this bias that anecdotal research and recording needs some sort of statistical backup and framework by which it can establish proof. So in the beginning, I think I was a bit sceptical about a research project which was purely anecdotal, and explored and celebrated subjective analysis and corroboration. So that's on the one hand. Then, on the other hand, having been through the research process now, I found it much better and a much more sincere and rewarding experience. Any of that statistical analysis would have

been useless to the integrity of the research, and would have taken away from the uniqueness of it – which is to put my story into that poetic layout – and would have taken away from the artistry of your design. So I'm really pleased that I got to celebrate my story and the narrative I have so far of my life and career. That's the most important thing.

3. Resolution

*At the end of my journey
I want to leave quietly.
I want to dance
through the margins,
around the meanings.*

In this work I have tried to speak in a new language –

*Where words were like the
warmth of light –
touching but never burning.*

*In this language
meanings would shift –
remembered only as
patterns of warmth and chill
traced on skin.*

But

*have words failed me
the black lines
threaded like tripwires across the page?*

*At the end of my journey
have I spoken a new language?*

*Is every word
plump?
Or have I spoken in the old language –
words hollow,
drained by my touch?*

*Have I danced
gently –
the lines of black ink my shadow?*

Has the silence

spoken for itself?

It is your turn to join the dance.

*Step in whispers
questions
patterns of light and dark.*

*At the end of my journey
what will you say?*

12.

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